The multi award-winning **MULTIFORMAT** games magazine | £4 | www.gamestm.co.uk | 37




eMag



250,000 – that's a big number and no mistake. Many publishers would be happy if their games sold that many, given the amount of mediocre FPS/action/racing titles out there today. But if we told you that *Nintendogs*, Nintendo's virtual pet simulator for the DS, sold over quarter of a million copies in the US in its first week alone (equivalent to one in every seven American DS owners), would you be surprised? We wouldn't.

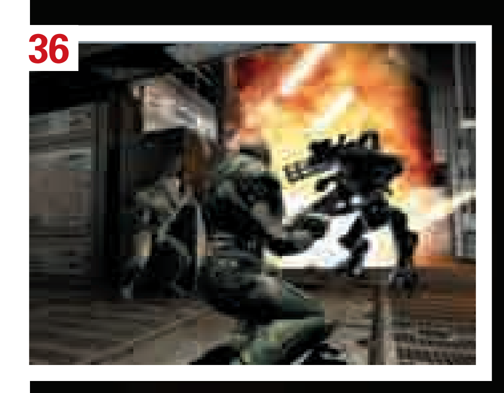
True, so *Nintendogs* can't really be called a game in the conventional sense, but then it's not a game in the same way that *Animal Crossing* – the GameCube life simulator that kept us captive for well over a year – isn't a game. It's an experience with goals. Just how much you get out of that experience is up to you, but then that's the point: with no definitive ending, you get out as much as you put in. The new Nintendo philosophy, perhaps? It's certainly got a ring to it.

Martin Mathers
Editor





CONTENTS



36

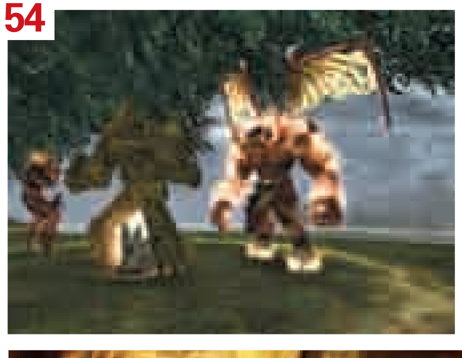


38





54





An end to a trilogy… or the start of something far bigger? Ubisoft's ill-fated Prince meets his darkest challenge yet in his third multiformat resurrection…
92
90
64 Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones



NEWS | INDUSTRY GOSSIP | OPINION

CONTENTS

FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

PERFECT SALES PITCH



Happiness is being the first to own what millions already have in the US…

Midnight store openings: better than sleep, vampirism and 24-hour drinking. Apparently.

"IT WAS **VERY ENCOURAGING** TO SEE THE **WIDE CULTURAL CROSS-SECTION** LINED UP TO **BUY THEIR PSPS"**

PHIL HARRISON, SCEE

SONY'S HANDHELD TAKES THE UK BY STORM

Well, you knew it was going to happen. Despite the never-ending delays, high prices and patchy launch line-up, the PSP has smashed every sales record known to man, and enjoyed the most successful launch weekend of any console in the UK. An incredible 185,000 units were sold in the first three days of retail; even more surprisingly, these are official figures from Chart-Track, as opposed to mere shipping totals from Sony itself.

Understandably, Sony's head honchos are very pleased. "We were elated with the launch of PSP," said Ray Maguire, MD of SCE UK. "There was a lot of hard work from everyone involved and the support from retail was fantastic. We saw an unprecedented 300 stores opening at midnight and throngs of customers filled with genuine enthusiasm."

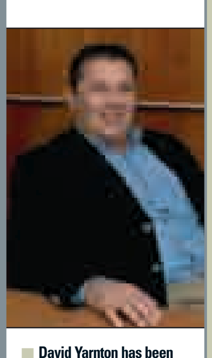
So successful is the launch that it has more than doubled the previous record that was held by the Nintendo DS, which sold in the region of 87,000 units in its first weekend. SCEE's VP of studios, Phil Harrison, was impressed with the impact of the PSP's launch. "It was very encouraging to see the wide cultural cross-section of society lined up to buy their PSPs," he said.

Of course, it's not just the hardware that's been doing great business. The initial batch of PSP software has been flying off the shelves, with nine of the top ten titles in the UK charts being PSP games at one point. Namco's *Ridge Racer* landed the top spot (a deserved achievement), with *WipEout Pure*, *Virtua Tennis* and *Metal Gear Ac!d* close behind.

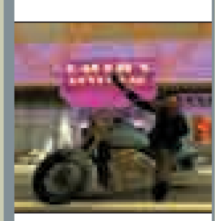
So it seems Sony has once again shown its market savvy and picked the right time to launch. Whether it's the anticipation that the delayed launch built up, or this country's current obsession with the latest handheld gadgetry that's aided Sony's plight, we're not sure. All we do know is that with the second generation of PSP software hitting shops as we go to press (*Burnout Legends*, anyone?), the future is looking very bright for the PSP.



Phil Harrison hasn't exactly been kind about Nintendo's latest machine.



David Yarnton has been magnanimous about the handheld market.



Liberty City Stories will no doubt boost the PSP's sales even more.

HANDBAGS AT DAWN

NEW FORMATS ALWAYS BRING OUT THE WORST IN PEOPLE, AND THE ARRIVAL OF THE PSP IS NO DIFFERENT

SONY GETS BITCHY…

To say Sony's comments leading up to the launch of the PSP were rather cutting is an understatement; indeed, the company's VP of studios, Phil Harrison, couldn't have been more forthright by declaring the Nintendo DS "an irrelevance". "It's not a fair comparison; not fair on them, I should stress," he boasted to trade magazine *MCV*. "That sounds arrogant, maybe, but it's the truth." Harrison also accused critics of being too hard on the PSP's launch line-up, reminding them that the PS2 launched with *Fantavision* – "a lovely piece of software, [but] by no means the software that defines the format". "When a format first comes out, the games you make are the games you know how to make, because you only have a limited amount of time to make them," he said. "The next games to come out are [when] the innovation starts to happen." We'll hold our breath now then, shall we?

… BUT NINTENDO STANDS FIRM

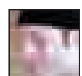
Meanwhile, in the Nintendo camp, its UK general manager, David Yarnton, chose to ignore jibes aimed in his direction and instead focused on the positives that a new handheld would bring to the company. "Whenever someone else has come into the market, whether it be Sony or Microsoft, it's been really good," he said at Nintendo's recent Christmas showcase (an event strangely resplendent in snow, Victorian carol singers and turkey dinner with all the trimmings). "Just look at the amount of media attention that's been given to handhelds since Sony started looking to get into the market – it's been really positive. We've had huge growth since that's happened." Whether or not that continues given Sony's recent success, of course, remains to be seen…

OUR TWO CENTS

It was perhaps inevitable that the PSP was going to shift some serious numbers in its opening weekend, although we'd suspect that even Sony might have been surprised at just how well it actually did. The trick will now be for the handheld to maintain that level of popularity, although the imminent launch of *GTA: Liberty City Stories* is likely to prove incredibly decisive on that front. But then the question still remains: will those not interested in the PSP but keen on Rockstar's seminal series want to spend £180 for just one game?

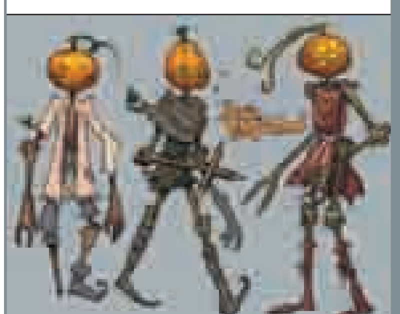


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



MCGEE WHIZ

Top creative game designer American McGee has just signed an agreement with Cellar Door Publishing for using properties of his creations in graphic novels like *Grimm, Bad Day LA* and the 'Emerald City on acid' adventure, *Oz.* McGee, who is responsible for previous warped games such as *Alice* and *Scrapland,* said: "I am excited, and I think fans will be too, that Cellar Door is going to open this flow of imagery to the outside world, in the best way possible." Optimistic then, but let's hope he continues to produce more interesting graphic stories in the future.





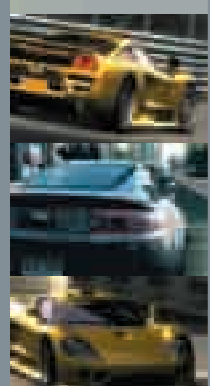
PINK FINGERS

Nintendo's world has got a lot more colourful, with the new blue and pink versions of the DS in Europe. Produced to coincide with the release of pet-'em-up *Nintendogs,* the new colours will be in stores by the time you read this. Of course, Japan already has a kaleidoscope full of colours to choose from including black, white, red and turquoise but it gets everything first. At present, silver is the only type of DS available here but more sleek finishes are certain to emerge as time goes on.

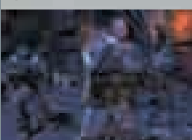


360 READY TO ROLL

MICROSOFT FILLS IN THE BLANKS OVER NEXT-GEN MONSTER



Can you honestly tell us you're not excited about this?



Or that you're not getting jumpy about playing this?

With the Xbox 360 due to hit the US on 22 November (and Europe on 2 December), it's about time that potential early adopters had all the info at their fingertips. Thankfully, Microsoft's developer group boss, Chris Satchell, has been happy to oblige. At a recent showcase, Satchell revealed a lot of exciting hot information about Microsoft's new baby.

Much of the news came in the form of confirmations of previously rumoured points; for example, he admitted that the 360's hard disk is required to play Xbox games in the new machine. As such, the £279.99 model, complete with the HD and a host of extras, is looking like the option for discerning gamers.

Other points were small but significant, particularly that the console can be switched on and off using the media remote control or the wireless pad. Another helping hand is the System 'Blade', which will automatically map custom control schemes and user preferences into your new games, saving you having to fiddle about every time.

But what's a Blade? It's Microsoft's name for the pages of the Xbox 360's user interface, of course. There's a Live Blade, a Game Blade and the aforementioned System Blade. The Blade Trilogy, if you will…

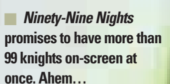
Not surprisingly, considering Microsoft's fondness of its XNA technology, Satchell mentioned the possibility of cross-platform development between Windows and the 360; the company plans for people to be able to play against each other using either platform. Obviously, Xbox Live Gold will be required for anything like this (and indeed, for online play), but it's nice to see that Microsoft isn't resting on its Live laurels.

Naturally, speculation is rife about the new pricing structure for the upgraded Gold service. American retail website EB Games has already posted information about a 12-month subscription, priced at a healthy $69.99 (about the same as a current year subscription), although Microsoft has yet to make an official announcement. However, the fact that this package is reputedly bundled with a headset, a $20 voucher off any 360 game, and 200 points to spend in the Xbox Live marketplace (the place to buy downloadable content and so on) makes the deal all the sweeter.

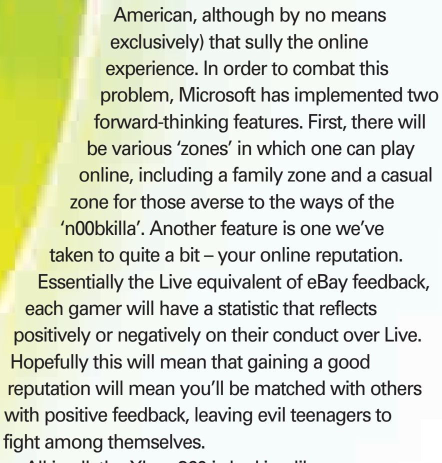
More interesting are the upgrades to the Live service itself. Anyone well versed in the ways of *Halo 2* on Live will be aware of the huge culture of xenophobic,

"CROSS-PLATFORM **DEVELOPMENT OF WINDOWS AND THE 360** WOULD MEAN GAMERS CAN **PLAY AGAINST EACH OTHER USING EITHER PLATFORM**"



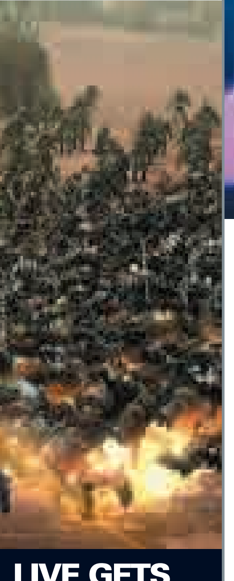


Ninety-Nine Nights promises to have more than 99 knights on-screen at once. Ahem…



homophobic teenagers (usually American, although by no means exclusively) that sully the online experience. In order to combat this problem, Microsoft has implemented two forward-thinking features. First, there will be various 'zones' in which one can play online, including a family zone and a casual zone for those averse to the ways of the 'n00bkilla'. Another feature is one we've taken to quite a bit – your online reputation. Essentially the Live equivalent of eBay feedback, each gamer will have a statistic that reflects positively or negatively on their conduct over Live. Hopefully this will mean that gaining a good reputation will mean you'll be matched with others with positive feedback, leaving evil teenagers to fight among themselves.

All in all, the Xbox 360 is looking like a veritable hub of user-friendly loveliness. On top of everything, there's complete compatibility with iPods (even to the extent that full visualisation playback is possible with one connected), and even compatibility with PSPs (Sony must be spitting feathers). Top it off with progressive scan-capable DVD playback straight out of the box and the 360 is looking like an essential piece of kit. Let's just hope the games can live up to the machine…



LIVE GETS THE NOD

Microsoft's stellar online service, Xbox Live, has been recognised by the US's National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (NATAS), and awarded an Emmy for Outstanding Achievement in Technology and Advanced New Media.

"Gaming and its particular needs have been a significant source of new technology development in the areas of video- and television-centric activities," said Seth Haberman, chair of the Video Gaming and Technology awards panel for NATAS. "It is quite natural that this work should be recognised in the same way that we've recognised the achievements in broadcast technology."

The award is great news for Microsoft, whose upcoming 360 launch can only be bolstered by such recognition. Hopefully, the 360 Live service will push online gaming further into the mainstream.



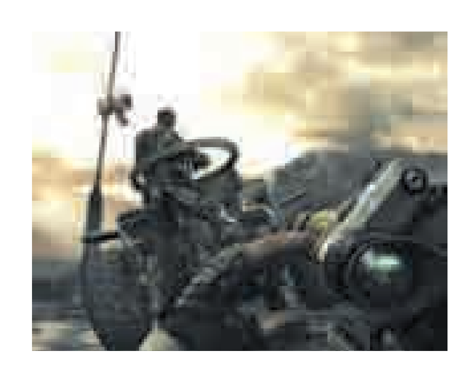
STORAGE MEDIUM CATFIGHT

HD-DVD MAY BE DELAYED AS SONY CONSIDERS DOUBLING ITS BLU-RAY CHANCES

For all those fascinated by the upcoming HD-DVD versus Blu-Ray battle, we ask 'what's wrong with you?'. That said, there's goings on aplenty on the storage medium front, with the announcement of a new double-speed Blu-Ray drive. As it's due to arrive before the launch of Sony's PlayStation3, the rumour mongers are already suggesting that Ken Kutaragi might be fitting his new console with these double-speed drives. If such speculation is true, Sony could gain another jump on the DVD-based Xbox 360. How this might impact on the price of a PlayStation3, however, is another matter entirely.

Unfortunately, Blu-Ray's main competitor – Toshiba's HD-DVD – may not appear on the suggested launch date. Though the format was due to arrive this Christmas, a Toshiba spokesman explained that the company has "not really decided" on the final date. He added that Toshiba is "now in talks with Hollywood studios and large-scale retailers to see the most effective timing of the launch and the best way to do it". This is news Sony will no doubt welcome, as it continues to pimp its Blu-Ray wares at every turn.

Of course, as long as we get to play great games that take full advantage of next-generation capabilities we'll be happy, whatever circular disc they might come on.



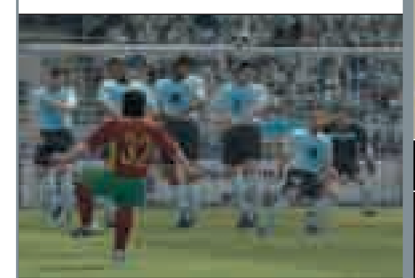


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



GOOOOOOOAL!

Another *Winning Eleven*, another runaway success. The latest edition of Konami's hit football series has sold more than 570,000 copies in Japan, with the majority of those shifting in the first week on sale. Though football isn't the national sport of Japan, the series (known as *Pro Evolution Soccer* on our shores) has always sold in vast quantities so it's not surprising that the latest version has racked up so many sales already. At time of going to press, the game continues to dominate Japanese charts, while the UK equivalent, *Pro Evo 5*, is due for release during November.



GRAPHICAL PERFECTION?

The fifth *Gran Turismo* game is tipped to be "a hundred times more detailed than *GT4*" by Polyphony Digital boss Kazunori Yamauchi. Yamauchi's boast came during an interview with Croatian car magazine *Auto Klub*, although he didn't say where the detail would lie – it could be graphics, physics or the whole lot. A game ten times more detailed than *GT4* would be a masterpiece, so we can't imagine what something 100 times more detailed would be like. Nevertheless, the PS3 title is already revving its engines for a 2007 release.





GAME PAUSED

Those of an artistic bent should definitely check out Game Paused.

Alas, there'll be no *FIFA* jollity this October.

ONE UK CONSUMER SHOW GETS ROLLING AS ANOTHER BITES THE DUST…

COME OUT AND PLAY

It's a weird time for UK gaming events right now – shows popping up left, right and centre, while others crumble into oblivion. With the revamped ECTS proving a big disappointment, the UK needs a solid consumer gaming event… even if it does need to be one with a bit more flair.

As such, the more creative kind of gamers among you are likely to enjoy the upcoming Game Paused event. Pitched as a "creative celebration of videogames, and the social culture it has created", it intends to reach art lovers in two distinct ways. A gallery exhibition is scheduled to run between 3-13 November at 138 Portobello Road in the heart of London's Notting Hill. However, those unable to get to the capital need not fret, as a book and DVD are being produced to highlight the finest pieces.

The best bit about Game Paused is that it's open to everyone who wishes to contribute. Anyone wishing to submit their own work to Game Paused can still do so by sending their pieces to thebook@weargame.com by 30 November. Or you can check out the website at www.weargame.com for more information on how to submit your work, and the types of media that the project will be exhibiting.

In our eyes, it's important for the discerning gaming community to show support for projects such as Game Paused – it's things like this that are pushing for videogames to be accepted as more than a simple and vacuous entertainment medium.

Sadly though, the only other gaming event scheduled for this year – The State Of Play, due to take place between 14-16 October at Birmingham NEC – has been placed on hold due to a lack of support from game publishers. Branded as a mini-E3 for the public, the event was expected to showcase the very best games due to be hitting our shores over the Christmas period, as well as having other exciting events to enjoy such as the first public showing of Microsoft's Xbox 360 and the 2005 FIFA Interactive World Cup.

Unfortunately, the whole event has had to be indefinitely postponed. A statement released by the show's organiser, Mark Adams, said that "save for EA, no one has signed on the dotted line", indicating the blame for the cancellation falls on the shoulders of publishers. Shame on you all.

> "THE MORE **CREATIVE TYPES OF GAMERS** ARE LIKELY TO **ENJOY THE GAME PAUSED EVENT**"



LAND OF THE RISING FUN

TOKYO GAME SHOW SET TO SHOWCASE BIG REVELATIONS

The Tokyo Game Show is just about to get underway at the Makuhari Messe Convention Center as we go to press. This means that deadlines prevent us from giving you full coverage of the event until the next issue, but there's already plenty known about what will be revealed.

Electronic Arts is set to take centre stage with a focus on development strategies for the next generation in talks from the firm's John Buchanan and Neil Young (not the singer, sadly). Microsoft's Robbie Bach and Nintendo's Satoru Iwata have been announced as keynote speakers and there are sure to be some serious next–gen rumblings thanks to the expected arrival of playable PS3 code and the unveiling of the Revolution controller.

This year's show is set to be one of the biggest ever, with over 130 companies signed up for the event (including 31 organisations from outside Japan). Not surprisingly, Sony and Microsoft will be dominating the floor space, heavily promoting their respective next generation consoles. Interestingly, Sega has confirmed it will be having an enormous stand. The fact that a next-generation *Sonic* game as well as new arcade takes on *Virtua Fighter* and *Afterburner* have already been confirmed has piqued our interest.

Feel suitably assured that **games™** will be providing you with all the answers next month when we dissect TGS and pull out the most vital information for you, our lovely readers.



Sonic will be 15 in 2006. Wonder what that is in hedgehog years…?

games™ THE TOP FIVE

NEXT-GEN SEQUEL WISHLIST



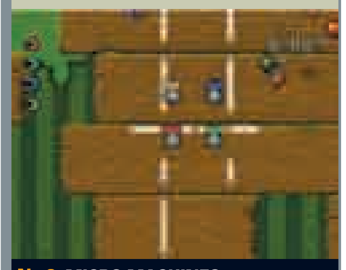
No.5 JET FORCE GEMINI

Too bad Rare has gone rubbish



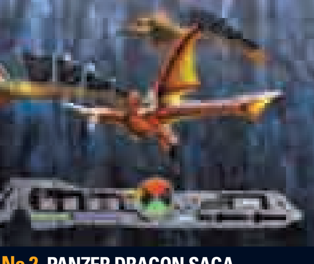
No.4 BISHI BASHI SPECIAL

With millions of stupid games, please



No.3 MICRO MACHINES

Make it top-down and we'll be very happy



No.2 PANZER DRAGON SAGA

We'd settle for an *Orta*-engine remake



No.1 VAGRANT STORY

Too complex for you? Bottlers…

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



NO. 37: WE BLAME THE PARENTS

Now don't get us wrong – we're all for parents keeping their kids' gaming habits from getting out of hand, but there must surely be a better way than calling in the services of this ridiculous contraption known as the Game Guardian.

This ill-conceived gadget is designed to let lazy parents limit their children's play time. Currently only available for the slimline PStwo, the Game Guardian locks the console into a dock that holds it in place. After inputting a four-digit pin code, said irresponsible guardians can dial in a time limit. When this countdown ends, the machine "will safely be shut down" (according to the website, meaning power to the console is cut) and the kid can run upstairs and do his or her homework. Genius.

What we'd really like to know, though, is whether the firm behind the Game Guardian has even seen a game in the last 20 years. We'd love to see the face of little Ben when his crucial 1-0 Master League-decider lead in *Pro Evo* disappears into a blip of light in the centre of the TV. Come on, people – if you can bring a child into this world, surely you can have the gumption to control their actions without the help of a futuristic egg timer…



You can imagine that face crumbling in two seconds when his game disappears.



More for the benefit of lazy parents than game-addled kids, yes?



BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



HEAVY ON THE WALLET

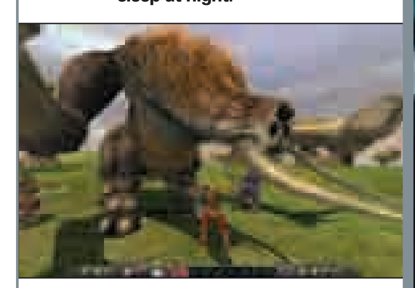
The latest handheld on the market, the Game Boy Micro, will set gamers back extra cash if they want to connect with previous versions of Nintendo's portable system. A new link cable and conversion connector will be needed if players want to combine other Micros or older Game Boys together, priced at £7 and £4 respectively. A wireless adaptor is needed to work with later *Pokémon* and *Mario Golf* GBA titles, costing you a further £10 when the Micro is released on 4 November. Ensure a plethora of tuts aimed at Nintendo…





ASHES TO ASHES

Despite proving a major success the world over, popular MMORPG *Asheron's Call 2* is coming to a permanent end at the end of the year. Developer Turbine Entertainment has decided to put its faithful MMORPG hound down on 30 December, as apparently the game is no longer profitable for the company. "*Asheron's Call 2* has reached the point where it no longer makes sense to continue the service," Turbine's CEO Jeffrey Anderson said on the game's official website. However, the original *Asheron's Call* is staying online so fans of the first title will still be able to sleep at night.



INTERNET GAME DISTRIBUTION BOOSTED IN THE UK

THINK OUT OF THE BOX



You'll never need to leave the house again – will food be downloadable too?

The growing popularity of broadband internet connections has brought with it many inconveniences. Bandwidth limits, unsightly surplus bills, hours wasted watching daft animations and playing Flash games… However, most people would say that, on balance, broadband is A Good Thing, and with the news that three different online videogame distribution systems are due to launch in the UK in the near future, it seems the games industry is inclined to agree.

Currently going down a storm is Europe's first 'games on demand' broadband distribution service called Metaboli. For a monthly subscription of £12.95, Metaboli offers gamers access to a library of 45 freely downloadable new games, including the recent *Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within*, while a lesser subscription of £6.95 grants access to a more limited selection of 31 titles. Gamers may download games as many times as they wish, even on different PCs, and Metaboli's operators hope to have 70 games online by the end of this year. With the backing of several of the big publishers – including Microsoft, Ubisoft and Eidos – there's confidence that Metaboli's PC game distribution service could well catch on.

Across the pond, September also saw the announcement of a similar American service branded GameTap, which offers a wide range of older games for download (over 1,000 of them, in fact) at a $14.95 monthly rate. The service incorporates a two-week free trial, which, hopes Dennis Quid, Turner Broadcasting Systems' executive vice president, will be "a great opportunity for an introductory self-tour". Should the service prove a success, the media giant hopes to expand it across a greater range of publishers by the end of 2006.

Most interesting, however, was the appearance of Infinium Labs' notorious Phantom at the Develop Industry Excellence Awards, which constituted its European debut. Having spent what seems like an age as pure vapourware, it appears the machine really does exist… although whether anything actually comes of the promised service still remains to be seen. "There is huge support for an effective online channel that takes gaming direct to consumers," said Infinium Labs' CEO, Kevin Bachus. Although it's now confirmed that the Phantom online distribution system will be arriving in Europe, no pricing or release dates were hinted at.

The reduced manufacturing costs, consumer convenience and piracy-preventive qualities of online distribution make it very attractive to consumers and publishers alike – it could become the primary distribution system for PC games in the near future.

> "THERE IS HUGE SUPPORT FOR AN EFFECTIVE ONLINE CHANNEL TO TAKE GAMING DIRECT TO CONSUMERS"
> *KEVIN BACHUS, INFINIUM LABS*



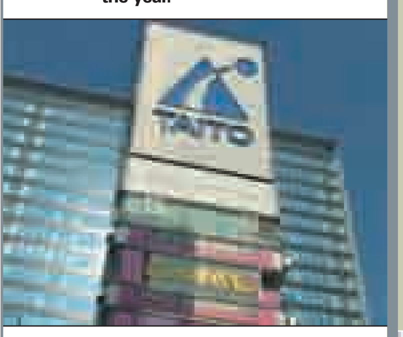
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



RAINBOW FANTASY

A huge merger could be on the cards for Square Enix, with the Japanese giant recently putting in a bid worth around £330 million to buy out Taito. Shares in both companies have risen rapidly after the *Final Fantasy* developer announced its plans to envelop struggling Taito, whose name is still big in the Eastern arcade market with classics such as *Bubble Bobble*. Kyocera Corp has also said it will sell its 36 per cent stake in Taito's shares to Square Enix, so the deal will probably materialise toward the end of the year.

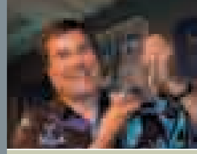


WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

There's no stopping the *World Of Warcraft* juggernaut – the amount of players has again doubled in the past two months. This takes the number of people who've lost their lives to the fantasy world to four million, making it the largest subscribing MMOG ever. To put this into context, imagine 64 football stadia filled with people linked to the internet all playing *Warcraft* at once. And 42 of them have Americans and Chinese players sitting in the stands. Mind-boggling.







David '*Elite*' Braben's legendary status was acknowledged.

BRITISH BRILLIANCE

UK DEVELOPERS RECOGNISED AT INDUSTRY AWARDS

The Develop Industry Excellence awards have been dubbed the Oscars of the games industry. It's a slight exaggeration but the third annual awards ceremony last month proved a resounding success. Over 350 industry figures convened in London to watch the awards – hosted by broadcaster Krishnan Guru Murthy – which recognised a variety of European talent.

The biggest winner of the evening was British developer Traveller's Tales, which scooped the newly introduced Best Use Of A Licence award for its endearing and best-selling *Lego Star Wars* title. The developer also picked up awards for Most Improved Studio and the Independent Developer award.

Fellow British developer Creative Assembly picked up the evening's Grand Prix award for the *Total War* series; Lionhead and Big Blue Box won the New Console IP award for *Fable*; while SCi picked up the Publishing Hero award following its recent acquisition of Eidos. Best of all, the much-coveted Development Legend award went to *Elite*'s co-creator David Braben – a well-deserved accolade if ever there was one.

The Develop Awards play a pivotal role in rewarding UK and European talent, and Stuart Dinsey, managing director of *Develop* magazine's publisher, was pleased with the event's continued success. "The British and European games development community remains a creative powerhouse of ambition and opportunity," he commented. "Their work is enjoyed by millions… It is only right that the unsung heroes of entertainment are recognised with these prestigious awards."

So long as European games development is being rewarded, there can be no stopping its continued growth as an industry; the Develop Awards' future, happily, seems secure.



We're still not sure about this. It's so… well, you know… Um…



OUT WITH THE OLD…

NINTENDO'S BIG SURPRISE IS A "REMOTE CONTROLLER"

Mere hours before we went to press, Nintendo used a rare appearance at the Tokyo Game Show to unveil not just the controller for its new Revolution system but also a few demos to show just how the crazy (or should that be ker-razee?) contraption works. As recent speculation suggested, the remote control-esque device is able to translate physical movement into on-screen action via a pair of sensors placed near your television (they're not there yet, don't worry). As if that wasn't curious enough, a port in the bottom of the remote will allow the connection of extra control devices, such as the analogue stick 'shower head' attachment that will make it easier to play FPSs and similar titles.

"We want a system that takes advantage of new technology for something that anyone – regardless of age or gender – can pick up and play," Shigeru Miyamoto commented. "We wanted a controller that somebody's mother will look at and not be afraid of." How it will work with more traditional games (including the promised back-catalogue titles – the controller is hardly post-NES friendly) is still a significant worry, although this is clearly not Nintendo's focus. More on the Revolution and the Tokyo Game Show next month.





BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



IT'S IN THE HANDHELD GAME

A new developer has entered Vancouver's bustling gaming fray, formed by five former members of Electronic Arts' Black Box division. Calling themselves Deep Fried Entertainment, they come armed with 35 years' worth of combined experience in the game industry and an arsenal of work on hits such as the *Baldur's Gate* and *Need for Speed Underground* series. The studio will only be producing portable games for the PSP and Nintendo DS, but seems raring to fire any future handheld hits at the gaming public as soon as possible, after swiftly snatching up all the proper licences to do so.



BLIZZARD TAKES ACTION OVER LAGGING SERVERS

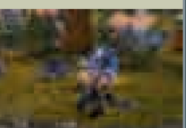


SLOW-MMO

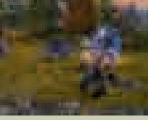
World Of Warcraft developer Blizzard Entertainment has been forced to issue refunds to players following a stream of complaints about its service. Blizzard's servers have come under fire following the sudden surge in new subscribers to *World Of Warcraft*. With lag being the primary cause for concern, gamers have complained about the slowdown that they have, in theory, created themselves.

Naturally, Blizzard is keen to placate frustrated players. "Two days' compensation will be offered to everyone, even those who remain unaffected by the problems," said a spokesperson from Blizzard. On top of this, players will also be granted additional 'rest' time, effectively boosting the amount of experience earned through missions and killing enemies.

However, as most have learnt through painful experience, laggy gameplay is one of the worst aspects of MMORPG gaming and many will argue that there is no excuse for it. One player posted a view on the official *Warcraft* forum in response to the compensation: "Two days doesn't seem very good for six days (and counting) of problems." A small number of gamers have also complained about being disconnected after a few minutes' play. At the time of going to press, this situation remains unresolved.



All the fun's there – you might have to wait for it…





NEXT STOP EUROPE

US RETAIL GIANTS UNITE AND EXPAND

The 'on again, off again' Electronics Boutique and GameStop merger hit an important juncture recently, as investors voted on the deal at the annual shareholder meeting. Not surprisingly, the board of directors on both companies advised them to vote in favour. Collectively, GameStop and EB own well over 3,000 shops, equating to around $3.8 billion in annual revenue (around £2 billion). Following the approval of the deal by the US Securities and Exchange Commission, stock levels shot up by over 50 per cent.

If all goes to plan over the next few months, EB will lose its name once again and the combined company will become known as GameStop before possibly turning its attentions towards Europe. EB Games recently picked up the Spanish retailer Jump, so it certainly wouldn't be a shock to see GameStop showing fierce competition closer to home.


eMag

LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE


"PRE-ORDERING JUST SEEMS SO OBSESSIVE, I'D RATHER AVOID IT. SOMETHING RATHER THAN SIMPLY DESIRE IT. PEOPLE DON'T


So, do you just want one or do you actually *need* one? Think hard, now. And don't all rush at once.

The date is set, then. Come 22 November, or so we believe in good faith, truckloads of green and white boxes with swirly circles on them will snugly harbour fresh, white Microsoft hardware in the stock rooms of game stores across North America. If the in-game footage of *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter* and *Project Gotham Racing 3* is anything to go by, this event should be a happy one. (The jury's still out on *Perfect Dark Zero*.)

The 22nd – a Tuesday, the same day of the week we get our normal games releases. But this is no normal release. Accordingly, that Tuesday is two days before Thanksgiving, three days before Black Friday, and right at the beginning of the all-encompassing multi-denominational period called the Holiday Season by politically correct newscasters. Thanksgiving, as you may be unaware if you are too young to have seen *Planes, Trains And Automobiles*, is simply a massive deal in these United States. Families assemble en masse; familial love dances on the cold air; and the 24-hour Butterball helpline stands by should disaster strike your turkey. The tradition is without religious roots, while still thoroughly American, so everyone can and does celebrate it.

Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, is famously the most intense shopping day of the year, so-called because businesses running in debt (in the red) for much of the year traditionally skyrocket into profit (the black) once this monstrous day strikes. It is the day, you see, when most people start their Christmas – sorry, Holiday – shopping. Beyond all coincidence, then, that Microsoft's Xbox 360 will launch just prior to this day that sees shopkeepers rubbing their hands with glee. If it's available on the first day of your month-long shopping quest, you won't forget to pick it up.

All of this is great timing for Microsoft, but it does put added strain on supply for something that could arguably sell out on any day of the year let alone right on the red-hot shopping bullseye of the entire calendar. The question, then, is whether or not to pre-order.

I've heard scary things. You know the sort. "If you don't get one in the first batch," people with vaguely inferred relation to retail warn, "you won't see another until January". You'll have heard the likes before if you've been gaming a long time or fraternise with a certain breed of forum regular, around new consoles as well as big – really big – game releases. In fact, it was *Halo 2* that really destroyed any pre-order dogma I'd previously subscribed to.

There had been nothing like the run-up to this game. Never mind January, you might be waiting for a new batch the following March if you hadn't been on the waiting list for months already. Demand was as high as humanly possible. It was an event. People ordered from three or four places just to ensure they got a copy. It was going to be war on the streets.

IT FEELS LIKE ADMITTING YOU NEED PRE-ORDER STEREOS, DO THEY?"

Queues around the block, fights breaking out, those motorcycle mutants from *Weird Science* screaming at shoppers. When the day came, admittedly slightly apprehensive, I wandered into an almost deserted Toys R Us, past a six-foot-tall cardboard Master Chief standee, and bought *Halo 2*, of which the store was in no shortage, without incident. I heard similar stories from back home, too; savvy shoppers strolling past lines of customers queuing in the cold outside their local Game, straight into Asda where the game was being sold like any other title alongside similarly non-pre-ordered loaves of bread and pints of milk.

I can't help but imagine acquisition of an Xbox 360 will be just as simple. Pre-ordering just seems so obsessive, I'd rather avoid it. Pre-ordering feels like admitting you need something, rather than simply desire it. People don't pre-order stereos or DVD players, do they? And if this time it doesn't turn out to be just another cynically manufactured ball of scaremongering hype, I can only hope the po' folk's plain vanilla version of *Modern Combat*, on the current Xbox, is as good as the demo suggests. Or that some kind soul is good enough to auction his 360 for $2,000 on eBay.

Many thanks



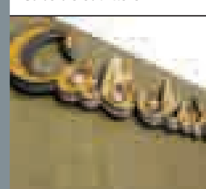
MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Safe plugs



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Cabela's outfitters



GOT ANY QUESTIONS FOR THE SHAPE? THEN JUST DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net YOU MIGHT GET A REPLY… OR POSSIBLY JUST THE FINGER.

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

REGISTER EXPRESS



A six-page entertainment newspaper that no matter what you do to avoid it is delivered free to every house with a living occupant. Littered with outdated syndicated articles, celebrity birthdays and reviews of month-old movies, it exists only as a vehicle for the wad of coupons inserted by local grocery stores.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Madden NFL 06	EA Sports	PS2
2	Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	Vivendi	PS2
3	Madden NFL 06	EA Sports	Xbox
4	Hulk: Incredible Destruction	Vivendi	Xbox
5	Rainbow Six: Lockdown	Ubisoft	Xbox
6	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	PS2
7	NCAA Football 06	EA Sports	PS2
8	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	PS2
9	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	PS2
10	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	Xbox

(Updated 19/09/05)



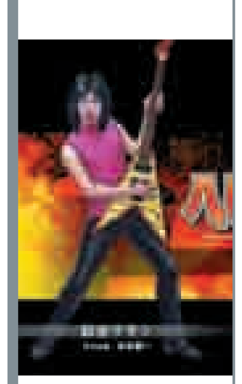
Destroy All Humans!

Hulk: Ultimate Destruction

KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"THE JAPANESE HAVE TENDED TO GROW FIXATED WITH THE ODDEST CULTURE. SADLY, THEY CATCH WIND OF HOT TRENDS



This is cutting edge but without the irony or postmodernism. So there.

It's no secret that sometimes stars fade and have to retire somewhere far from the public eye. What many of you may not know is that even ex-celebrities have to make money once they've gone far away. You've probably heard about stars like Brad Pitt or Bruce Willis doing commercials for credit cards or gas in Japan, though they're hardly faded; I wager you weren't aware that Eric Martin, singer from long-deceased pop-rock band Mr Big, is hard at work in the Tokyo underground thrash metal scene, screaming in Japanese three or four nights a week in basements around Tokyo.

The Japanese have tended to catch the oddest corners of our cultures and grow fixated on them. Sadly, they tend to catch wind of hot trends some 20 or 30 years too late. Right now, it's heavy metal music. There's a television show on every Thursday at two in the morning called *Heavy Metal Thunder*, hosted by some creepy, big-haired, Japanese metalhead dudes and co-hosted by these tall, Russian-looking women in dominatrix outfits (candy-red lipstick, police caps, aviator sunglasses and all). The special guest every week tends to be Marty Friedman, ex-guitarist for legendary metal band Megadeth, who speaks broken Japanese, grins a lot, displays (on demand) freakish talent with an electric guitar, and still has a really bad perm. Who the show is targeted at, I don't know, but I do know who pays for it – Square Enix. It's been doing it for about a year. All the commercials are for Square Enix games or Square Enix manga. Most prominently featured is the Square Enix title *Heavy Metal Thunder*, which was either in production before or after the advent of the show – it's impossible to tell. Either way, the commercials are always different. Big, creepy yakuza dudes screaming at one another in a boardroom about how the game 'needs more heavy metal', using different words every time, seems to be the motif. It's supposed to be funny. And it is… near three in the morning.

Heavy Metal Thunder features a bitchin' theme song by Japan's heavy metal heroes Sex Machineguns, with guest guitar legends Marty Friedman and Michael Schenker. The soundtrack is of unbelievable pedigree, if you dig metal rock. The character designs and story are all by Harold Sakuishi, artist of the cult smash-hit rock manga *Beck*. The story of *Hebimetasan* (as the hip kids are calling it) deals with a young boy wishing to become the greatest robot fighter in his futuristic world, where robots fight to the tune of heavy metal music on TV all day, every day.

The game was finally released on 1 September and it's utter nonsense. It's Japanese nonsense made with full awareness of its nature as Japanese nonsense, and such nonsense is layered



CORNERS OF WESTERN POP 20 OR 30 YEARS TOO LATE"

thick as steel. As a game, it's as weak as plywood. It's all about battling, and the battle system is a mere paper-rock-scissors set-up that requires you to beat your opponent in a set of two duels to score a hit, giving it false depth. Supposedly, the story is full of cheeky humour and extends out to a poignant point. I just don't have the patience for it, which is saying a lot. I really wanted to like it – if not for the heavy metal, for the characters and story, or for the fact that it's produced by the Media.Vision team that made the *Wild Arms* games. In the end, though, I wonder who this game is really made for. The answer is not that elusive – it's for people who regularly watch Russian dominatrices on television at 2am of course.

The right analogue stick, flicked during battle, produces an electric guitar lick of randomised intensity. Says the instruction manual, "This will not affect the game in any way". Yeah, it's that kind of game.

Kind regards



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON 37: DEPARTING ON A ROCK AND ROLL ADVENTURE

[Honoo ni makikomareteiru doujou wo mitsumenagara.] Aniki – kore kara dou suru no?	[While staring at the dojo, wreathed in flames.] Big bro, what are you gonna do now?
Ore wa, dare yori mo tsuyoku naranakya naran.	I… must become stronger than anyone else.
Ittai, douyatte tsuyoku naru tsumori, aniki? Aitsura wa kekkou okotterushi; doko ni ittemo oikakerareru hazuda!	Wh-what are you gonna do to get that strong, big bro? Those guys are really angry; they'll follow you wherever you go!
Yama no oku made kiete, asoko ni suunenkan gitaa no ude wo migaku tsumori da!	I shall disappear deep into the mountains; and there, for many years, I will polish my guitar arm.

MEANWHILE, WHAT'S NINTENDO DOING?

I'm so glad you asked! Nintendo released its Game Boy Micro on 14 September. It has been running clever little commercials that show hands on a Famicom controller, moving in real time as Mario jumping fills out the soundtrack until Mario dies. Then the screen blacks out and up pops the start-of-level screen. Instead of a stage number, we get '9-14-2005', and Mario's lives are 'x20'. Clever! It's the twentieth anniversary of *Super Mario Bros.*

There are proper Game Boy Micro ads as well, in which famous pop musicians such as Kimura Kaera are handed a Micro without being told what it is and are then delighted to have it in their hands. I won't comment on what I think of Nintendo's assumption that people will be willing to spend ¥14,000 for the momentary joy of seeing a tiny *Super Mario* in the palms of their hands. Instead, I'll say two things: first, the unit is so shiny it's slippery – my finger won't stay on the control pad; second, *Super Mario* came out in 1985 in Japan – it took the West, what, three years to catch on? (Now I figured out what *Heavy Metal Thunder's* attitude reminds me of – '*Super Mario Bros.: The Movie*'.)

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Fighting For ONE PIECE	Bandai	PS2
2	DS Training For Adults: WYB	Nintendo	DS
3	Gentle Brain Exercises	Nintendo	DS
4	Tales Of Legendia	Namco	PS2
5	World Soccer Winning Eleven 9	Konami	PS2
6	Jump Super Stars	Nintendo	DS
7	Mobile Suit Gundam: Seed Destiny	Bandai	PS2
8	Kingdom Hearts: Final Mix	Square Enix	PS2
9	Final Fantasy X	Square Enix	PS2
10	Naruto: Uzumaki Ninden	Bandai	PS2

(Week ending 11/09/05 © 2005 Media Create Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved)


Winning Eleven 9

Tales Of Legendia



GROW UP OR SHUT UP



How do you react when you learn that someone is an AOL user? What do you think of them if they drive a Skoda? When someone asks you "Do you want fries with that?", do you make a judgement call on his or her intellect? There are countless generalisations that people apply to others based on the smallest of factors or their association with something alien.

Is it any wonder, then, that many people often consider all gamers to be immature children? You and I know this isn't the case for all of us, but it's not very difficult to understand where the assumption comes from. Look at your typical online gaming community. Not a pretty sight, is it?

Evidence of gamer crimes is more widespread than we might like. The moment Amazon listed Xbox 360 and PlayStation3 in its catalogues the comments appeared from gamers who were only too keen to kick-start the next generation of console wars.

Gaming has been under very close scrutiny recently. Many gamers have felt insulted by the generalisations the media has used to describe them. They want the media to make some effort to understand their point of view and understand their mentality. Sadly, the behaviour of the vocal majority seems to indicate that gamers are just as bad as the media makes out.

Gamers, for better or worse, represent videogaming as much as the developers, publishers, retailers and advertisers. When the mainstream media wants to dig up some dirt to portray games in a bad light they don't need to delve very deep.

If large numbers of gamers persist in behaving like irresponsible children then we shouldn't be surprised when others seek to treat them that way.

Mr X is bitter, jaded and somewhat dead inside. But not old. Well, not yet anyway.

FROM THE FRONT

GLOOMY NEWS AS ATARI SUFFERS, CYAN WORLDS SEES LAY-OFFS AND ACCLAIM ALLEGATIONS EMERGE

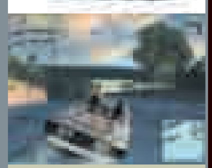
TOUGH TIMES FOR HARD-UP ATARI

ATARI IN A STATE



Are we going to see the end of this famous logo?





Ironically, another *Driv3r* could be just what Atari needs. We don't, though.

Ah, Atari – we remember when that name stood for quality and industry dominance. But now even the brand's lingering associations with success are being regimentally stamped out. The publisher is in financial trouble after a woefully unsuccessful first quarter of the fiscal year, reporting an overall loss of $32 million before 30 June.

As far as excuses go, Atari states that it has failed to find a title as lucrative as last year's dismal-but-inexplicably-successful *Driv3r* to tide the company over during the dry period it has recently faced, while over-reliance on catalogue sales is another possible reason for the firm's problems. In any case, the company's turnover this quarter was $24.2 million, a significant drop on the figures from this time last year.

This news follows the sudden and unexpected departure of Atari CEO James Caparro in June and problems with the company's NASDAQ listing (which, it must be stated, had nothing to do with Atari's financial situation and has recently been resolved). Atari has had to approach its bank to ask for assistance in meeting its fiscal commitments and for "waivers of certain financial covenants", which sounds to us like the company's trying to buy time.

However, all is not lost for the publisher, thanks to parent firm Infogrames stepping in to save the day (at least for the time being). Although the full extent of the financial assistance that Infogrames will be providing hasn't been disclosed, the French publisher seems keen to keep Atari afloat.

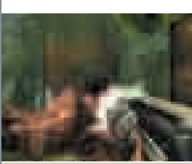
"As a result of the support of Infogrames, we believe Atari will have the financial flexibility to meet the current demands of the marketplace and be better positioned for future growth and worldwide exploitation of [its] IPs," said Bruno Bonnell, who currently takes charge of both companies. Infogrames' commitment to its subsidiary, however misadvised it might be considered to be, appears to be unwavering.

"ATARI SAYS IT'S FAILED TO FIND A TITLE AS LUCRATIVE AS DRIV3R"

ACCLAIM'S FORMER CHIEFS FACE LAWSUIT OVER PROFESSIONAL MISCONDUCT

BACK-ROOM BANKRUPTCY?

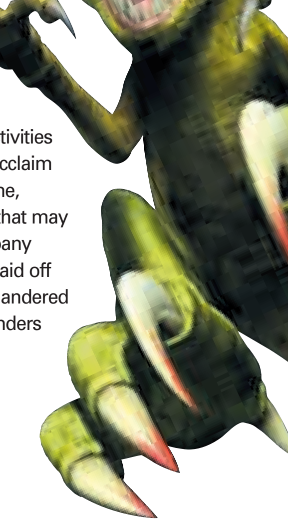




Perhaps it wasn't all *Turok's* fault after all.



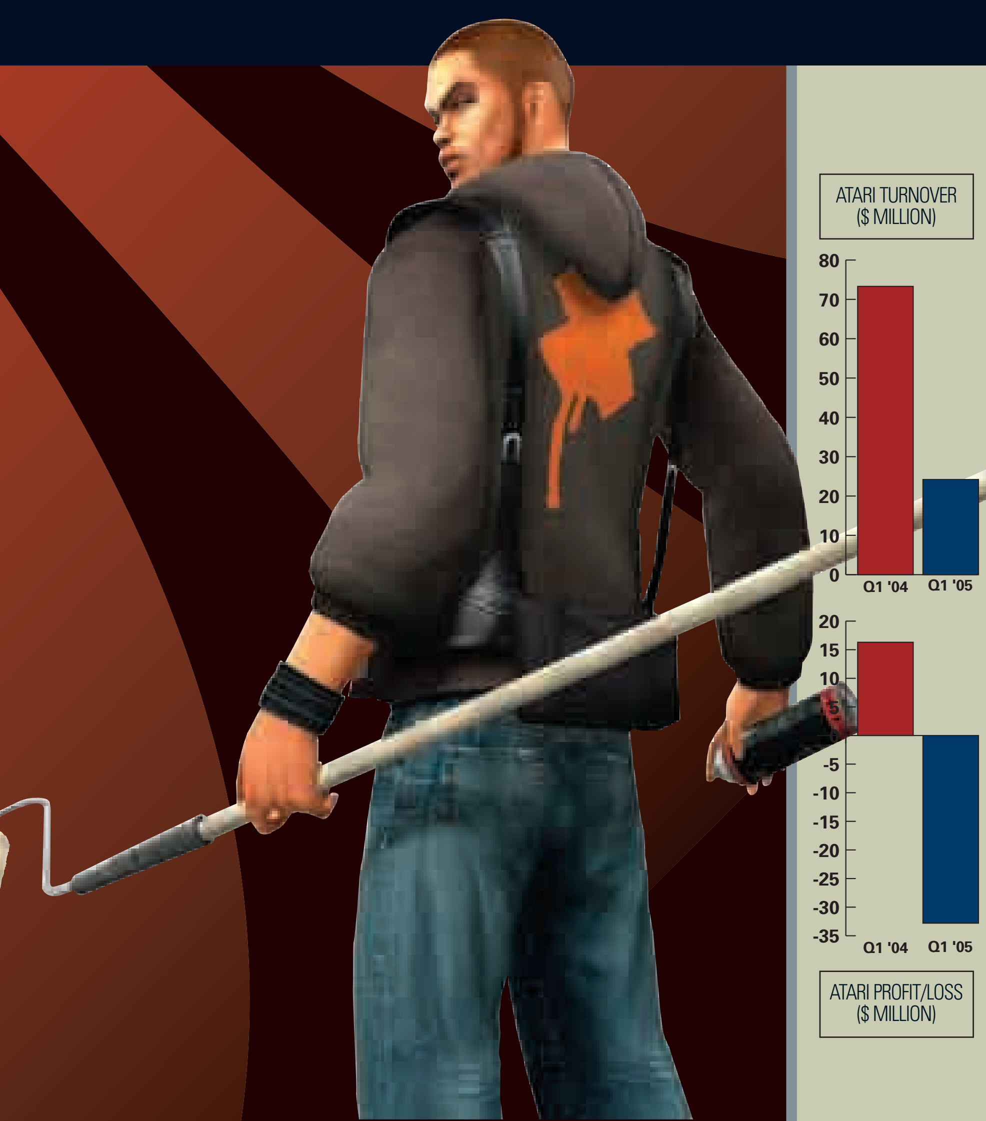
Were funds used to buy fancy cars? That's for the judge to decide…



Acclaim's bankruptcy is widely believed to have been due to the less than stellar games it had taken to publishing. However, inappropriate use of company funds by bosses may have been a contributing factor. A former Acclaim trustee has announced plans to take up a $150 million lawsuit against the company's former directors, who, he alleges, treated the firm as "a personal piggy bank".

As well as claiming that some executives removed artwork and equipment from Acclaim's HQ when it declared its bankruptcy and failed to keep proper financial records, the former trustee also accuses the directors of working together to give themselves huge amounts of money in the form of pay rises and bonuses.

Allegedly, these activities all took place while Acclaim was in financial decline, meaning that assets that may have saved the company from bankruptcy or paid off its creditors were squandered by the likes of co-founders Greg Fischbach and James Scoroposki.



ATARI TURNOVER ($ MILLION)

Quarter	Turnover ($ million)
Q1 '04	~73
Q1 '05	~24

ATARI PROFIT/LOSS ($ MILLION)

Quarter	Profit/Loss ($ million)
Q1 '04	~16
Q1 '05	~-33

MYST NO MORE



CYAN WORLDS ANNOUNCES MASS REDUNDANCIES

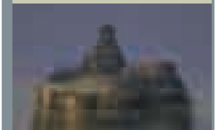
Myst developer Cyan Worlds' future looks shaky after most of its employees were made redundant at the beginning of September. The company's founder, Rand Miller, and its president are said to be the only two remaining employees after publisher-in-charge Ubisoft closed Cyan's games production unit. The news broke as several employees reported it on their online blogs, and Ubisoft has subsequently issued a statement expressing its dismay at the decision.

Happily, there does not appear to be much bitterness among the developer's former employees. "I've heard horror stories about how things like this go down at other companies, but they're being very generous here," said Bill Slease, *Myst V*'s production director. "It's obvious that it breaks Rand's heart to let everyone go."

Myst held the record as the world's best-selling PC game for over five years until *The Sims* ousted it from the record books. Though the game's sequels have waned in popularity over the years, the decision to close Cyan World's studio does not affect the publishing of *Myst V: End Of Ages*.

MYST V END OF AGES

Despite the troubles at Cyan Worlds, *Myst V* should still be appearing.



No more lush fantasy worlds? We'll have to wait and see…

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Rainbow Six: Lockdown	Ubisoft	Multi
2	Brian Lara Int. Cricket 2005	Codemasters	Multi
3	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	Multi
4	Ridge Racer	Sony	PSP
5	Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	Vivendi	Multi
6	Virtua Tennis: World Tour	Sega	PSP
7	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	PSP
8	WipEout Pure	EA	PSP
9	NFS Underground: Rivals	EA	PSP
10	Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	Sega	Multi

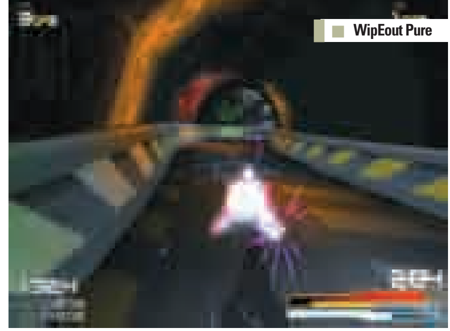
The PSP is dominating the charts at the moment. However, in the run-up to Christmas – which starts in September, unfortunately – we might be seeing a bit more variety.

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 8 September 2005)



Rainbow Six: Lockdown

Brian Lara Int. Cricket 2005

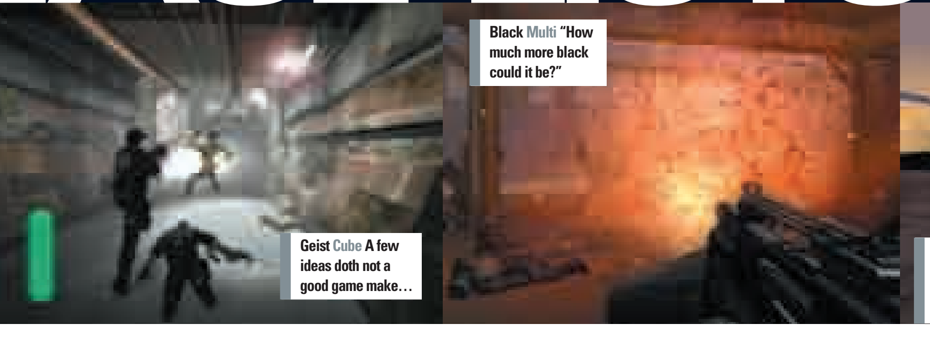


WipEout Pure

RELEASE LISTS



SSX On Tour Multi All 'piste' gags will be shot on sight. Promise.



Geist Cube A few ideas doth not a good game make…

Black Multi "How much more black could it be?"



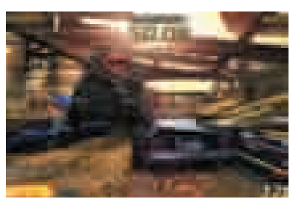
Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess Cube Link returns but there's not a Twiglet in sight…

games™ MOST PLAYED

BURNOUT REVENGE

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Electronic Arts

Two weeks, three controllers and one retina transplant later, *Revenge* had been taken down. Every rival punished, every course aced and every event cleared. Now we can't wait to do it all over again with the retail version and sample the game's online delights. The world's about to get faster…



WINNING ELEVEN 9

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Konami

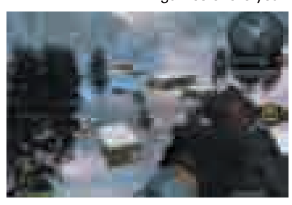
We'd love to tell you about all the great games we've been playing but there's a slight problem. It's all about *Winning Eleven 9*. Working on our skills with sneaky games of *Ubiquitous Evolution* under the desks has helped our game no end – it's like we're back at school.



BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Electronic Arts

It's only an online demo but we can't get enough of this sort of war these days. A single map is all we have to tide us over till the end of year release but we're confident that *Modern Combat* will be one of the best online games of the year.





PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami	
TBC	Crash Tag Team Racing	Vivendi	
TBC	S.L.A.I.	Konami	
OCTOBER '05			
7 October	NASCAR '06: Total Team Control	Electronic Arts	
7 October	Armored Core: Nexus	Digital Jesters	
14 October	Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	Atari	
14 October	Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Koch Media	
14 October	Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	Activision	Wanted
14 October	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
14 October	Darkwatch	Ubisoft	
21 October	L.A. Rush	Midway	
28 October	Makai Kingdom: Chronicles Of The Sacred Tome	Koei	Wanted
28 October	Without Warning	Capcom	
TBC	NHL 2006	Electronic Arts	
TBC	EyeToy: Play 3	Sony	
TBC	Soul Calibur III	Sony	Wanted
NOVEMBER '05			
4 November	Capcom Classics Collection	Capcom	
4 November	Resident Evil 4	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	Midway	
TBC	Battlestations: Midway	SCi	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves	Sony	
TBC	Need For Speed Most Wanted	Electronic Arts	
Q4 '05			
TBC	GUN	Activision	
TBC	From Russia With Love	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	Wanted
TBC	FIFA 06	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Shadow The Hedgehog	Sega	
TBC	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Rogue Trooper	SCi	
TBC	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	X-Men Legends II: Rise Of Apocalypse	Activision	
TBC	SSX On Tour	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	The Matrix: Path Of Neo	Atari	
TBC	Marvel Nemesis: Rise Of The Imperfects	Electronic Arts	
2006			
TBC	Devil Kings	Capcom	
TBC	Metal Gear Solid 4	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Shadow Of The Colossus	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Onimusha: Dawn Of Dreams	Capcom	
TBC	Okami	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	Wanted



GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Crash Tag Team Racing	Vivendi	
OCTOBER '05			
14 October	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
14 October	Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	Activision	Wanted
TBC	NHL 2006	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Dancing Stage: Mario Mix	Nintendo	
TBC	Geist	Nintendo	
NOVEMBER '05			
TBC	Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Pokémon XD: Gale Of Darkness	Nintendo	
TBC	Need For Speed Most Wanted	Electronic Arts	
Q4 '05			
TBC	Marvel Nemesis: Rise Of The Imperfects	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Shadow The Hedgehog	Sega	
TBC	GUN	Activision	
TBC	FIFA 06	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Battalion Wars	Nintendo	
TBC	From Russia With Love	Electronic Arts	
TBC	X-Men Legends II: Rise Of Apocalypse	Activision	
TBC	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Fire Emblem: Path Of Radiance	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	SSX On Tour	Electronic Arts	
2006			
TBC	The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Viewtiful Joe Red Hot Rumble	Capcom	

XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher
Q3 '05		
TBC	Crash Tag Team Racing	Vivendi
OCTOBER '05		
7 October	Stargate SG-1: The Alliance	JoWood
7 October	NASCAR '06: Total Team Control	Electronic Arts
7 October	Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes	Koch Media
14 October	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision
14 October	Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Koch Media
14 October	Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	Atari
14 October	Darkwatch	Ubisoft
21 October	L.A. Rush	Midway
28 October	Without Warning	Capcom

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks
Multi Excuse me, waiter – I don't think this is done…

GTA: Liberty City Stories
PSP Mean streets in the palm of your hand. Lovely.

Castlevania: Dawn Of Sorrow
DS Konami sinks its fangs into some double-screen action.

TBC	NHL 2006	Electronic Arts	Wanted
NOVEMBER '05			
TBC	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Battlestations: Midway	SCi	
TBC	Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	Midway	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Need For Speed Most Wanted	Electronic Arts	
Q4 '05			
TBC	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	Wanted
TBC	FIFA 06	Electronic Arts	
TBC	GUN	Activision	
TBC	SSX On Tour	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	The Matrix: Path Of Neo	Atari	
2006			
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Black	Electronic Arts	Wanted



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
Q3 '05			
TBC	NHL Eastside Hockey Manager 2005	Sega	
TBC	Starship Troopers	Empire	
OCTOBER '05			
7 October	Stargate SG-1: The Alliance	JoWood	
7 October	Total Club Manager 2006	Electronic Arts	
14 October	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
TBC	NHL 2006	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	F.E.A.R.	Vivendi	Wanted
NOVEMBER '05			
TBC	Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	Midway	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Battlestations: Midway	SCi	
TBC	Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Need For Speed Most Wanted	Electronic Arts	
Q4 '05			
TBC	X-Men Legends II: Rise Of Apocalypse	Activision	
TBC	Age Of Empires III	Microsoft	
TBC	Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	2K Games	Wanted
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	Wanted
TBC	FIFA 06	Electronic Arts	
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.	THQ	Wanted
TBC	The Movies	Activision	Wanted
2006			
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	TimeShift	Atari	Wanted
TBC	Phantasy Star Universe	Sega	

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	
OCTOBER '05			
14 October	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
NOVEMBER '05			
4 November	Alien Hominid	Zoo Digital	Wanted
TBC	King Kong	Ubisoft	
TBC	Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones	Ubisoft	Wanted
Q4 '05			
TBC	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	FIFA 2006	ElectronicArts	

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Month	Title	Publisher	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Burnout Legends	Electronic Arts	Wanted
OCTOBER '05			
TBC	FIFA Football	Electronic Arts	
NOVEMBER '05			
TBC	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Need For Speed Most Wanted	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	Activision	Wanted
Q4 '05			
TBC	Dead To Rights: Reckoning	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	Rockstar	Wanted
TBC	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	
2006			
TBC	Viewtiful Joe Red Hot Rumble	Capcom	
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Monster Hunter Portable	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	SSX On Tour	Electronic Arts	

NINTENDO DS

Month	Title	Publisher	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Lunar Genesis	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Crash Tag Team Racing	Vivendi	
OCTOBER '05			
14 October	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
TBC	Metroid Prime: Hunters	Nintendo	
NOVEMBER '05			
TBC	King Kong	Ubisoft	
TBC	Need For Speed Most Wanted	Electronic Arts	
Q4 '05			
TBC	Mario & Luigi 2	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Animal Crossing DS	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	FIFA 06	Electronic Arts	
TBC	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	
2006			
TBC	Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Pokémon Diamond/Pearl	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Viewtiful Joe Double Trouble	Capcom	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.

gamesTM ON THE HORIZON

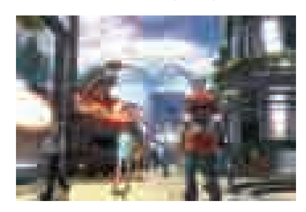
NINETY-NINE NIGHTS

Format: Xbox 360
Publisher: Microsoft
Phantagram, the creator of *Kingdom Under Fire*, is getting into the next-gen flow, and if you thought its latest games had a great sense of scale, wait 'til you see this: tens of thousands of enemies, combos that take hundreds out at once, and bodies flying as far as the eye can see. Fingers crossed for a UK release…



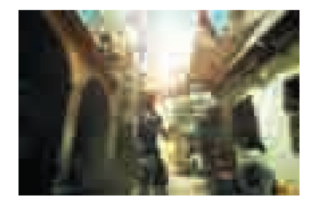
ENCHANT ARM

Format: Xbox 360
Publisher: FROM Software
FROM's latest 360 title might not even make it over here – eNCHANT arM is an original turn-based-magic-action-'em-up with a poor grasp of capitalisation. A rather pretty game with a fair bit of potential but, once again, a PAL release isn't exactly likely.



RESIDENT EVIL 5

Format: Multiformat
Publisher: Capcom
Given that we're still going back to *Resident Evil 4* whenever we feel like really hurting some non-zombies, the next instalment simply can't come soon enough. Just give us tension, guns, loads of enemies and the return of the legendary Barry Burton and we'll be happy as Larry. Whoever he is.





The harder they come, the harder they fall **Metal Slug 2 – Neo-Geo AES [SNK] 1998**



GRAND THEFT AUTO: LIBERTY CITY STORIES

ONE CITY, INDIVISIBLE, WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL

It's rare that a new format gets a game that defines its existence so early in its lifespan. The only one we can think of is *Super Mario 64* on the N64; a game that was never really bested on the system despite being available from the console's launch. And yet here we are, just over a month after the launch of the PSP, and the handheld already appears to have its defining game. (Or two, if you include the marvel that is *Burnout Legends*.)

Now, we'd like to think that you know us well enough by now to realise that we're not the gushy type when it comes to looking at games. That said, it's hard to talk about *Liberty City Stories* without sounding over-enthusiastic. Certainly, we can appreciate why some have already taken a cautious and cynical approach to the game, simply because of short cuts that it appears to have made; just like PSP cohorts such as *Ridge Racer* and *Burnout Legends*, *Liberty City Stories* recycles material from other iterations of the series (in this case, the entire *GTA III* map). But to suggest that such resourcefulness (it's not laziness) will prove detrimental to the game is missing the point. The streets might be familiar, but the grime beneath them is a different matter…

"*Liberty City Stories* is an entirely new storyline with all brand new missions," says Gordon Hall, studio director at Rockstar Leeds. "The production teams in New York, Edinburgh and here in Leeds have been instrumental in bringing a fresh feel to the game. We have been working very closely with Rockstar North and the production team in New York to create *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories*. All aspects, from the gameplay to the mission structure, have been retooled, creating the true next step in the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise."

Of course, it doesn't take a genius to spot that in taking a step forward, *Liberty City Stories* takes several back first. Delving into the franchise's lore, the game opens three years prior to the events in *GTA III* on an important event; namely, the return of Antonio 'Toni' Cipriani to Liberty City. If the name doesn't ring a bell, it should – Toni's missions, organised from the patio of his mother's Italian restaurant, made for a key part of *GTA III*'s opening third, although getting to play as him rather than working

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Rockstar
DEVELOPER: Rockstar Leeds
RELEASE: 14 October
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

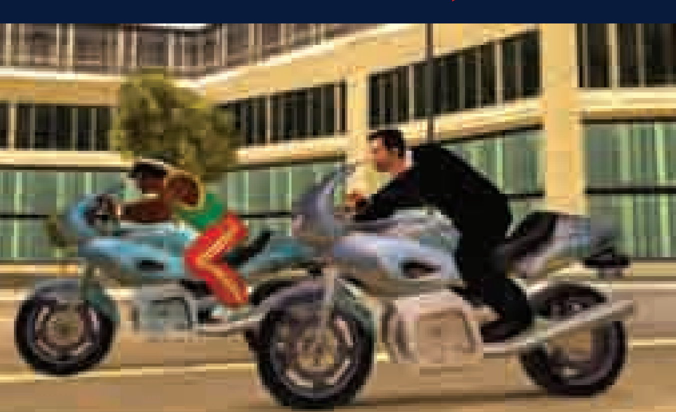
No short cuts, no remakes, no compromises – the PSP plays host to the next *Grand Theft Auto* and delivers exactly what you've come to expect from the series.

HISTORY

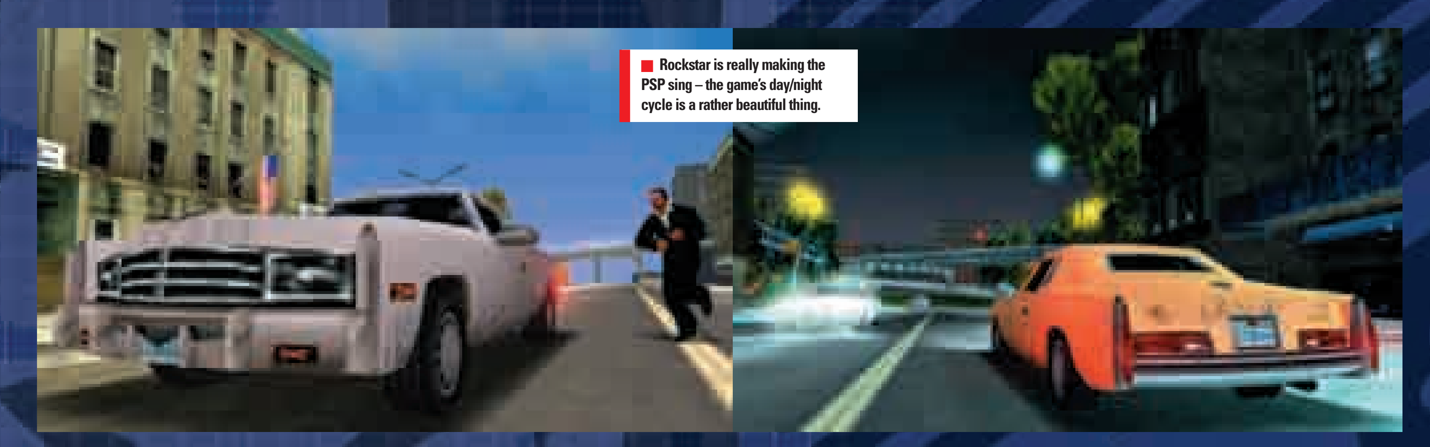
GTA has come on in leaps and bounds from the original game in 1997, and *Liberty City Stories* marks the series' eighth outing.



Of course the cops are going to be on your tail most of the time. You've got a reputation, after all…







Rockstar is really making the PSP sing – the game's day/night cycle is a rather beautiful thing.

RADIO GA-GA

Typically for a *Grand Theft Auto* title, *Liberty City Stories* brings its world to life through a soundtrack that's as varied as any other game in the series. Naturally, the stations are grounded in the nostalgia of Liberty City, although the music played on them is unique to the late Nineties setting of the action – something that will no doubt add to the atmosphere. However, while Rockstar hasn't either confirmed or denied anything, it's unlikely that *Liberty City Stories* will support the option for players to create custom soundtracks (as you could on the Xbox version of *San Andreas*) running from the PSP's memory stick – though, to be fair, that's not nearly as big a loss as some more cynical types might believe.

under him opens up a new chapter as far as Rockstar is concerned. "It made sense to everyone involved to go back to Liberty City and re-examine that locale in light of all the improvements that have been made in the franchise in the last four years," Hall explains. "There is so much new shared lore from the games that came after *Grand Theft Auto III* that there is this rich history from which to craft this incredible new experience. Not to mention all the technical enhancements that we can now add, things that weren't possible when Liberty City was first revisited in *Grand Theft Auto III.*"

Lighting, polygon counts and technical mumbo-jumbo aside, the scene is set for our new protagonist to shine. Having laid low for four years following his brutal murder of a made man at Don Salvatore Leone's request, Toni's determined to get the respect he deserves from the Leone family and it's your job to help him climb the Mafia ladder. The fact that everyone in the city – from rival Mafia families and Toni's Triad enemies to politicians, perverts and even his own mother – stand in your way shouldn't be too much of an obstacle when you work for the toughest Mafia boss in town… although, thankfully, the familiar surroundings don't make things too easy.

"Plenty of things changed in the three years between *Liberty City Stories* and *GTA III*," says Hall, "and the researchers in New York were instrumental in making sure

"NOSTALGIA PLAYS A BIG PART, BUT THOSE CONCERNED THAT THIS IS GTA III ALL OVER AGAIN SHOULD PUT THOSE FEARS TO REST"



that we nailed the late Nineties timeframe. Because *Liberty City Stories* takes place earlier in the timeline, some buildings and city infrastructure haven't been constructed, while some landmarks, in classic *GTA* fashion, will be deconstructed. Many other small details have changed, but there are plenty that are not so subtle; for example, Sex Club Seven in *GTA III*'s Red Light district [where players went to get missions from local Mafia goon Luigi] is now called Paulie's Review Bar. It's run by a new lowlife called JD O'Toole, who will present the player with a ton of new missions." But if even these tweaks sound obvious, you'll be glad to hear that it really is all change in the crime capital of gaming. "For the player who spent a considerable amount of time in



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Founded at the end of 1997, Rockstar Leeds previously went by the name of Mobius Entertainment. However, following its successful work on *Max Payne* for the GBA, the developer was bought by Rockstar in April 2004. The studio now focuses its time primarily on handheld projects and is based, not surprisingly, in Leeds.

HISTORY

- ■ **MIDNIGHT CLUB 3** 2005 [PSP]
- ■ **MAX PAYNE** 2003 [GBA]
- ■ **BARBIE HORSE ADVENTURES** 2003 [GBA]

■ "Dang! You got shocks, pegs… lucky! You ever take it off any sweet jumps?" Course we have…



"RETURNING TO LIBERTY CITY AND BRINGING IT TO LIFE ON A HANDHELD SYSTEM HAS BEEN EXTREMELY INSPIRING FOR US"

SAM HOUSER, PRESIDENT, ROCKSTAR GAMES

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BACK TO THE OLD STOMPING GROUND

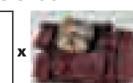

GTA III

-



REHASH

x

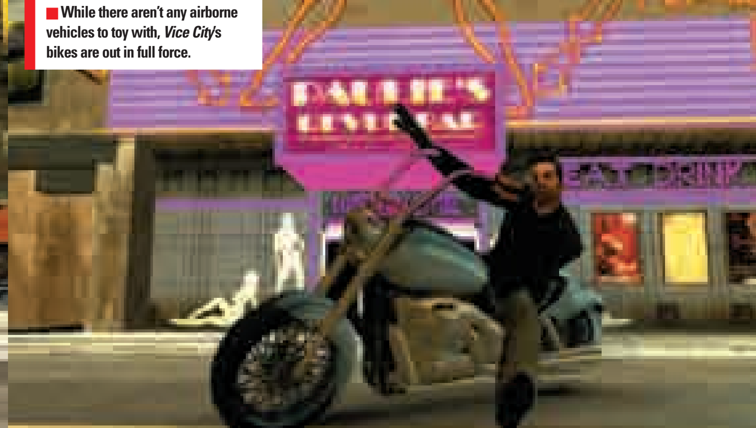


POCKET SIZED

=


LIBERTY CITY STORIES





■ While there aren't any airborne vehicles to toy with, *Vice City*'s bikes are out in full force.



PUBLISHER PROFILE

■ Despite still operating under its parent company, Take 2 Interactive, Rockstar Games has become a successful entity in its own right as both a publisher and developer. It continues to bring smaller studios into its fold (such as the additions of Vancouver, Vienna and Leeds) while running its operations from offices in London and New York.

HISTORY

- **GTA: SAN ANDREAS** 2004 [Multi]
- **RED DEAD REVOLVER** 2004 [Multi]
- **MANHUNT** 2003 [Multi]





■ The series' ever-present freedom is still clearly present, even in the palm of your hand. Good work.

"ONCE WE HEARD WHAT SONY WAS PROMISING IN TERMS OF HARDWARE, WE SET OUR SIGHTS ON A FULL 3D GRAND THEFT AUTO AND NEVER LOOKED BACK"

GORDON HALL, STUDIO DIRECTOR, ROCKSTAR LEEDS

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

While there might be a few people and locales in Liberty City that those familiar with *GTA III* will recognise, Rockstar has been busy coming up with plenty of new material that helps to dispel the feelings of déjà vu. In terms of faces, it's more noticeable as you'll find yourself dealing with people you've never met before. From the Avenging Angels (a street gang with a strange take on keeping the peace) and Father Ned (the local priest with more than just saintly thoughts on his mind), to business mogul and social parasite Donald Love or the anti-internet group Citizens United Negating Technology For Life And People's Safety, you certainly won't be short of people to run errands for on your way up the Leone family ladder.

GTA III, there will be all sorts of nuances they'll remember that we're taking advantage of. Besides the entirely new storyline and missions that make the game feel incredibly new, so many small details in Liberty City (such as safehouse layout, interaction, pick-up locations, signage, building locations and so on) have changed."

This case of evolution (or even devolution) rather than revolution that permeates the whole experience may be the sticking point for many critics. As a series that takes giant steps forward with each iteration, there's no denying that *LCS* treads water somewhat in terms of concepts. With the game taking inspiration from every part of the series, from the motorbikes of *Vice City* to the weapons and targeting system of *San Andreas*, some may find the lack of progress a little disappointing. "It was a really long, difficult process of analysing features," admits Hall. "Complicating the process was the fact that *Liberty City* was not designed with future features in mind, so it's been an interesting design progression as we've tried different things, analysed what works and doesn't work to determine our final feature set. Having the original Rockstar North design team working side by side with us on the project has made this process much easier, though."

To be brutally honest, we'd say that to complain about the lack of advancement made by *LCS* is to fail to realise quite what an achievement it is. After all, it's a new and entirely 3D *GTA* game in the palm of your hand with all the missions, side-quests (of which there are more than in *GTA III*) and polish contained therein – something that many people appear to be taking for granted simply because they've been sold on how powerful the PSP purports to be. The controls, mapped comprehensively onto the PSP as they are, work surprisingly well despite their relative complexity, allowing you to swerve through the streets



■ There's still a decent amount of traffic about the city. The PSP's *Midnight Club 3* was no fluke…

MAN ON A MISSION

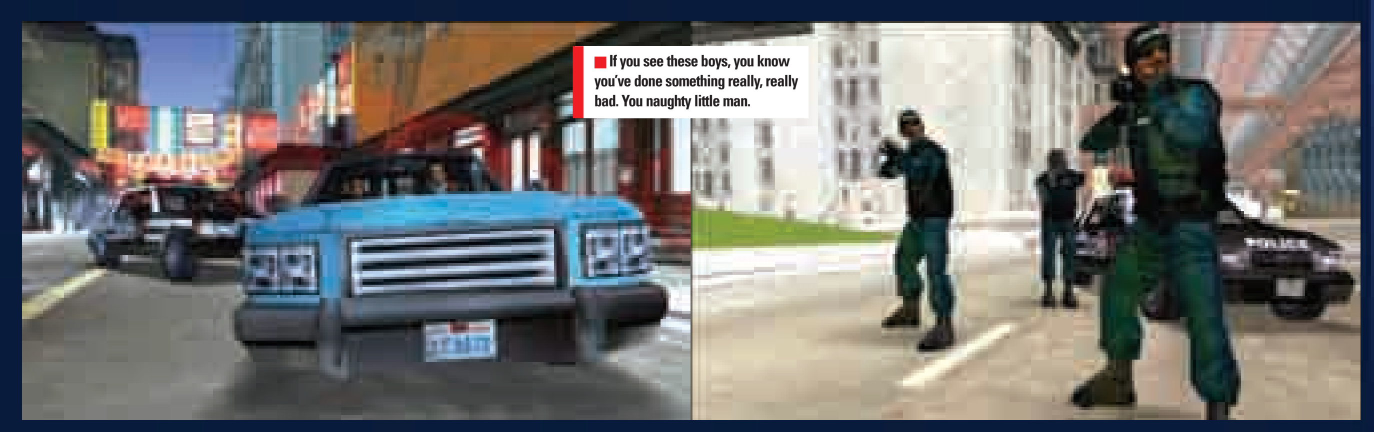
Rockstar Leeds' decision to reduce mission length in light of the handheld medium might sound a little drastic, but that doesn't mean that the tasks require any less work. In the initial area of Portland, many of the missions focus on the hatred between the Leones, the Sindaccos (a rival family outfit) and the Triads – protecting the Leone casino from a Triad attack, taking Salvatore's girlfriend shopping and so on – but as you move out toward Staunton Island and Shoreside Vale, things get more interesting. Hunting down three 'purveyors of sin' (celebrities, to you and me) and blowing them up with rockets or helping Salvatore escape the cops on the back of a boat is all par for the course, and things just keep getting more interesting from there…

with the confidence of any other *GTA* game. The visuals, as crisp as any on the PSP with a draw distance that's far greater than you'd expect, stand as testament to Rockstar Leeds' abilities with the handheld following technical marvel, *Midnight Club 3*. "Both projects have been challenging for their own reasons – I wouldn't say that *Liberty City Stories* has been overwhelmingly more difficult to create than *Midnight Club 3*. It's all about delicate resource management and balancing, similar to late life-cycle PlayStation2 development," Hall tells us.

"Regarding the battery, we're doing extensive play testing to optimise how data is stored on the disc," he adds. "The goal is ensuring that we hit the disc as infrequently as possible during play. Loading times are a non-issue in *Liberty City Stories* as you only see a load when you begin the game and cross between the three islands." It is an unimaginable feat – and one that will no doubt shift more PSPs than any other game on the system (providing Sony can supply enough machines, of course). In fact, it's almost a little too unbelievable.

"To be totally honest, we never considered anything else," insists Hall. "Early on we were working primarily with a PC software emulator provided by Sony while the hardware was still in development. Almost all the early engine, data layering and system design work was done there." Hall continues to delve into the past, addressing the firm's original intentions. "Once we heard what Sony was promising in terms of hardware, we set our sights on a full 3D PlayStation2-style *Grand Theft Auto* and never looked back. If we'd been unable to achieve that, we wouldn't be shipping the game – it would have been scrapped in development. That said, there were, of course, doubts that it would be possible, and many hurdles to jump to make it happen. I'm not quite ready to look at the game objectively just yet. Hopefully in the next few weeks as we finish up and fans get some playing time I'll have a better perspective of just how good it really is."

"WE'RE CLEARLY NOT THE GUSHY TYPE, BUT IT'S HARD TO TALK ABOUT LIBERTY CITY STORIES WITHOUT SOUNDING LIKE WE ARE"



If you see these boys, you know you've done something really, really bad. You naughty little man.

QUAKE 4

"WELCOME TO THE SOLDIER SIDE – THERE'S NO ONE HERE BUT ME"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC, Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Raven Software
RELEASE: Q4 '05
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1 (2-16 Online)

CONCEPT

All the best parts of id's games – *Quake II*'s story, *Quake III Arena*'s multiplayer and *Doom 3*'s visuals – all mixed and baked for 30 minutes. Mmm, that's good shooting.

Playing *Quake 4* for the first time is a surreal experience. Admittedly, our circumstances made it interesting – sitting in a testing room, being watched by id's Todd Hollenshead – but even so, that did little to counter the bemusement that spread through us as we ventured into Raven Software's long-awaited tale of warfare and alien-centric violence. And much as it doesn't sound it, bemusement is the right word, as what we've played of *Quake 4* so far (or its single-player story mode, at least) feels so, well, *Doomy*.

That's right – we said *Doomy*. Maybe it's that our memories of previous experiences on the planet Stroggos involve brown corridors, darker brown floors and the occasional flash of fiery lava, but at this relatively finished preview stage *Quake 4* feels more like an add-on for *Doom 3* than the game we knew and loved. That isn't to say that Raven isn't working wonders with the new *Doom* engine to create a game worthy of carrying on the *Quake* legacy; but having played id's hell-bound title, *Quake 4* offers more déjà vu than we expected. Gloomy corridors of steel and iron? Sand-blasted alien wastes? Dark chambers full of industrial technology? They're all here – it's almost like an empty template waiting for a storyline to be dropped into it, rather than a new game. The only obvious difference seems to be the Strogg themselves: marauding bio-mechanical aliens who prefer to smash through glass and rip holes in walls to get to you, rather than appear out of thin air through demonic portals.

Thankfully, differences do start to appear as you progress. From the need to support your fellow troops during heavier firefights (whether you're protecting a lone engineer or an entire convoy) to the option to drive around the landscape in a heavily armed hover tank and an *Aliens*-esque mechanised walker at certain points, Raven seems to have thought far enough ahead to break up the cautious approach of the on-foot FPS action. Still, the familiar corridors make it difficult to shake the feeling that this is just an extension of the *Doom* series rather than the next iteration of *Quake*. Until you play the multiplayer, that is.

Ah yes, *Quake 4*'s multiplayer. Blissfully distinct from the single-player game, the difference between creeping through corridors in fear of what's ahead and sprinting across open spaces with all guns blazing really does have to be seen to be believed. Raven's determination to capture the essence of everything that was right with *Quake III Arena* seems to have paid off, not least because it is *Quake III Arena* all over again, albeit dragged kicking and screaming into the next visual generation.

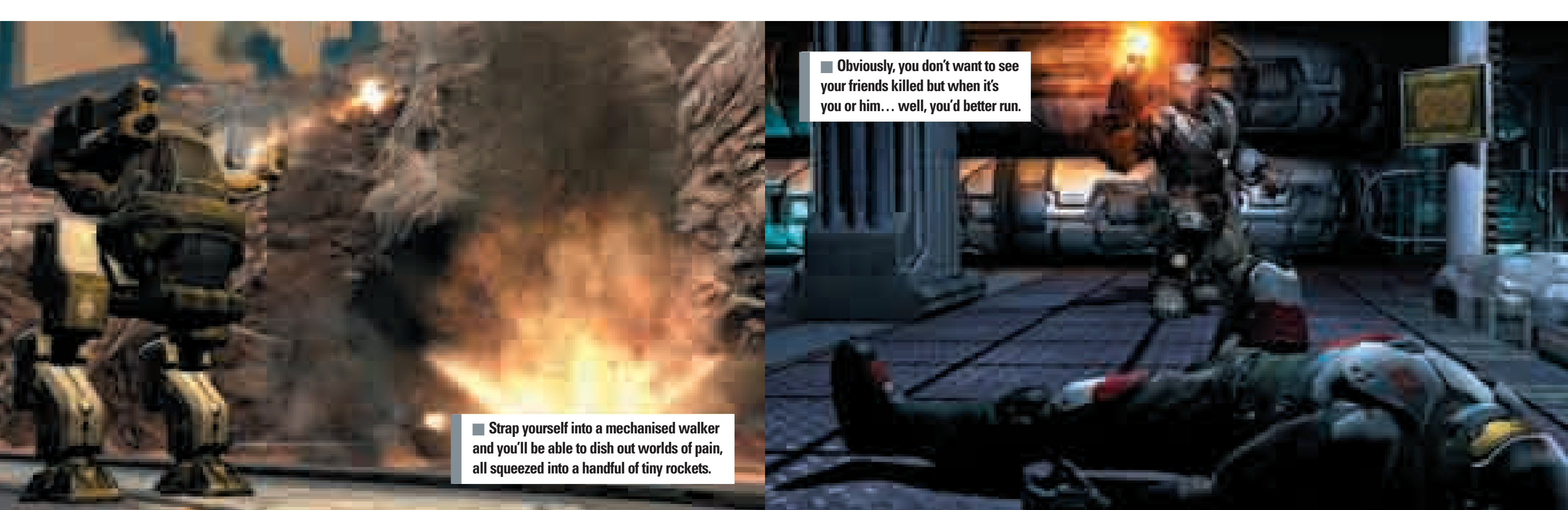
It's fast, furious and, dare we say it, seemingly more fun than the single-player mode, despite the fact that it's barely an improvement gameplay-wise over the previous multiplayer-centric effort. But the fact it's the same is perhaps what makes it work so well; flying off ramp bumpers, performing rocket jumps and fragging people left, right and centre was so well tuned in *Quake III Arena*, we're pleased that *Quake 4* does little to change that.

Raven and id have taken the attitude that the game will be 'ready when it's ready', although it seems almost there from the substantial amount we had the pleasure of playing. True, it feels like two games welded awkwardly together but then we suspect this will only strengthen its appeal to two different audiences; if anything, we'd expect it to become the leading online title (particularly on Xbox 360) when id finally decides to unleash it.

TWIST IN THE TALE

Given the current trend for keeping gaming storylines completely under wraps (not to mention id's reputation for secrecy), we have to confess complete surprise at the decision to reveal *Quake 4*'s massive plot twist before the game is even finished. That Kane's fate is one of horrific mutilation and torture at the hands of the Strogg has been made clear since E3, and his ultimate transformation into an unstoppable war machine is something that only the most cave-dwelling of gamers are still unaware of. As such, we can only hope that even bigger surprises lie in wait for those able to conquer *Quake 4*'s single-player mode… although the odds of Kane eventually rising to become the new leader of the Strogg are currently 4-2 against.

"IT'S ALMOST LIKE TWO DIFFERENT GAMES: DOOM 3'S CAUTIOUS SINGLE-PLAYER MEETS QUAKE III ARENA'S FRANTIC MULTIPLAYER"



Obviously, you don't want to see your friends killed but when it's you or him… well, you'd better run.

Strap yourself into a mechanised walker and you'll be able to dish out worlds of pain, all squeezed into a handful of tiny rockets.





DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Despite dabbling in other genres, Raven Software's pedigree in the FPS field is well-established – from the early days of *Hexen II* and *Heretic II* through to the creation of the *Soldier Of Fortune* series and beyond, the studio's links with the genre (and with id Software's *Quake III Arena* engine) are well catalogued.

HISTORY

- **X-MEN LEGENDS** 2004 [Multi]
- **JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY** 2004 [Multi]
- **SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II: DOUBLE HELIX** 2002 [PC]

■ The Strogg come in many forms, but to be honest, they're all as dangerous as each other.

■ Who'd have thought that a tank versus a spider could be such a close call?

"IN THIS EPIC WAR BETWEEN WORLDS, THE ONLY WAY TO DEFEAT THE STROGG IS TO BECOME ONE OF THEM…"
RAVEN SOFTWARE WEBSITE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SORTING THE WHEAT FROM THE CHAFF

QUAKE II + QUAKE III: ARENA + DOOM 3 = QUAKE 4

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

RAGE, RAGE AGAINST THE DELAYING OF THE TWILIGHT



There'll certainly be a more rural feel to this title. Just wait until he gets his hat…

It can be a cruel world sometimes. After months of speculation and rumour, we finally got to see screenshots of *Twilight Princess*. Some of us wept, while others were content to laugh at the tears of their colleagues. Then, in an effort to further our anticipation, at E3 we were treated to a short video clip and a few playable areas. But just when we could smell the Rupee-filled jars, the game gets delayed.

All the fist-shaking in the world isn't going to make any difference we're afraid. We're all going to have to wait until early 2006 to delve into Link's latest adventure, but at least we can be 100 per cent sure that Nintendo is throwing everything it has at the title. It's now common knowledge that a couple of dungeons were shaved off *Wind Waker* to ensure it was launched at the best time, and with the Christmas period approaching we couldn't help but feel uneasy at the possibility of this happening to *Twilight Princess* (causing anti-Link types to again unjustly slap the game down for being too short).

No, this proves that Nintendo is going to do this right, and though we may have one less rectangular package under our tree come December, when *Twilight Princess* arrives, it's going to be very special.

It may not be special in the way that many think it will, though. People we've spoken to recently have claimed this will be a revolutionary new game that's changing the face of the series. This just isn't going to be the case though. We've played it – we know. On being presented with a forest temple – a feature that's now seemingly included as standard in *Zelda* titles – a fleeting glance at the layout gave us a fairly good idea of where we had to head to first obtain the Map, then where the Compass was hidden. A new weapon and a few swinging monkeys later and we're using the item we just earned to destroy the dungeon boss. You really couldn't be changing the face of the series any less.

Sure, the game's looking stunning and the new horseback sections should liven up even the most tedious of trips across an oversized field but, generally, it seems as if we can look forward to far more of what we've all grown to love with a bundle of wolf-antics and horseplay thrown in to sweeten the deal. And, oh, how sweet it is.

> "WE CAN BE SURE THAT NINTENDO IS THROWING EVERYTHING IT HAS AT THE TITLE"

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '06
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Link returns in another time and place to foil the forces of evil.



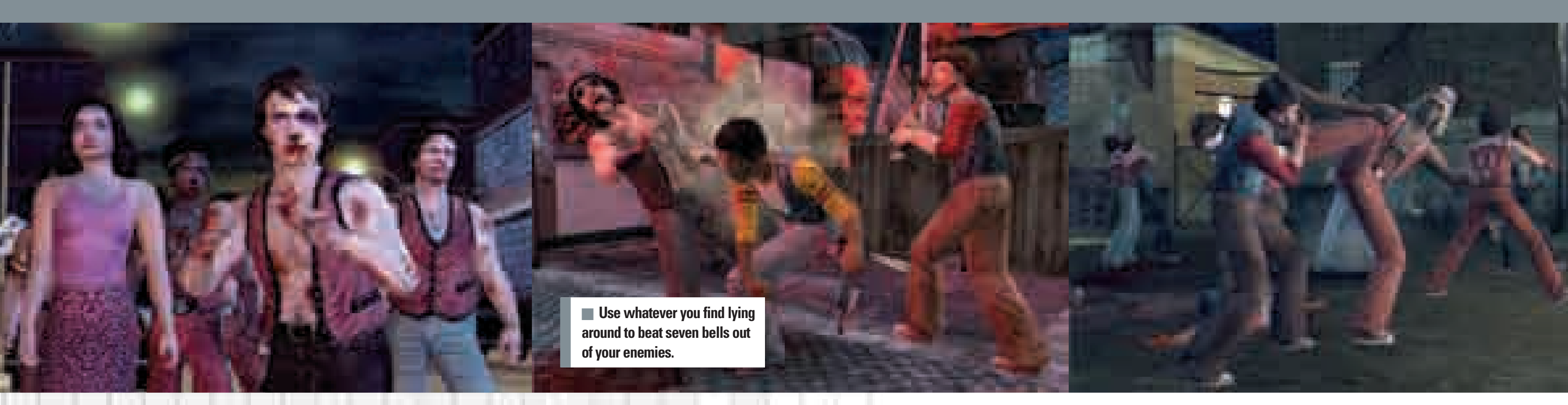
The dungeons may bring back memories, but the horse riding is definitely something a little different.



Man on horse against Moblin on warthog – hardly seems fair to us.


eMag

THE WARRIORS



■ Use whatever you find lying around to beat seven bells out of your enemies.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Rockstar Games
DEVELOPER: Rockstar Toronto
RELEASE: 27 October
GENRE: Beat-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

■ The creator of *Grand Theft Auto* turns its attention to the flagging scrolling beat-'em-up genre. Will the Rockstar magic rub off on Swan and his crew?

"WE'RE GOING LIKE EVERYONE ELSE – NINE GUYS, NO WEAPONS"

The concept of 2D gaming may not be dead, but the move from two to three dimensions has certainly caused a few genre casualties along the way. The free-roaming beat-'em-up, for instance – once ruled by greatness like *Streets Of Rage* or *Final Fight* – is now languishing in the gutter thanks to recent atrocities such as *SpikeOut: Battle Street* and *Beat Down: Fists Of Vengeance*. That doesn't mean there isn't life in the old beast, of course; it just needs someone with the balls to revive it and, not surprisingly, Rockstar might be the publisher for the job.

In making *The Warriors*, Rockstar Toronto is determined to create a solid free-roaming brawler. While the licence is an important part of that, it's just as much about the paint used as it is the final portrait. To that end, the developer has worked hard to create an engine that offers creativity to the player in terms of combat, with challenging missions that demand more than just mashing buttons. Thankfully, what we've seen so far suggests that it has succeeded.

The Warriors' combat system has multiple layers (including lengthy combos, environmental and tag-team attacks), and introduces elements rarely seen in the genre such as the option to use stealth during missions, or the War Chief commands that allow you to dictate the actions of fellow Warriors (be it following you, holding position or going on an all-out rampage). And then there's the two-player co-op available at any time during the single-player game; the clever use of the camera (split-screen when players are far apart, merging once they're close) means it's not about pushing forward *Gauntlet*-style.

Of course, the game is incredibly authentic regarding the licence, with every movie-related cut-scene being a shot-for-shot re-creation of the film. However, with only the final 30 per cent of the game actually following the movie plot, Rockstar has had to be quite creative with the backstory by telling the tales of how each Warrior came to be in the gang, as well as the events leading up to Cyrus' killing at the start of the movie.

"ROCKSTAR COULD BE THE PUBLISHER WITH THE BALLS TO REVIVE THE GENRE"

However, it's because the game is tied to such a cultural phenomenon that the whole thing seems to work. Better than the usual generic 'man fights through city to save girl' pap we used to get from scrolling fighters, at least the action has some context you can relate to. And as the genre is pretty much on its last legs, we can certainly dig that.



■ Team up with a mate for when the burden of street violence needs to be shared.

■ The half-marathon mission is yet to be confirmed. Look, there's Sir Jimmy Saville! Perhaps.


eMag

TITAN QUEST

THE BIGGER THEY ARE…

DETAILS
FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Iron Lore
RELEASE: TBA '06
GENRE: Action RPG
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT
Take a trip back to ancient times and lead your adventurer through various myths and legends on a mission to defeat the gods.

When it comes to telling tall tales, people are pretty rubbish. Aside from the odd Elvis sighting and the invention of a big, green worm that frequents a certain loch in Scotland, we're fairly unimaginative. Fortunately, our history features many other races that were a little more inventive than us. The Greeks, for instance, seemed to specialise in inventing large beasties for us to battle in videogame form. *God Of War* was a great example of this, so it was only a matter of time before we saw other genres harvesting the legends once again to provide us with yet more entertainment of the monstrous sort.

Titan Quest will be doing exactly this, only this time we're looking at an action RPG rather than a violence-drenched adventure game, so it's safe to assume that you'd best start thinking of ways to free up some time if you're going to step up and indulge in a slice of this Greek/ Egyptian mythology.

This 'ancient legends' theme is obviously very important to Iron Lore. Rather than force-feeding us a stack of information about the tale that will be told, the developer is keen to emphasise the background instead. The story is an area that the studio has put on hold for a while, favouring to work on exactly how the game will play before throwing time into an involving script. Thanks to this train of thought, it would look as though some of the problems that we now come to expect from this genre will finally be addressed and the greatest of these improvements currently looks to be the enemy AI.

What Iron Lore is trying to achieve is for the enemies that roam the land to be aware of what they – as well as other opponents around them – are capable of. It all sounds rather strange, but if it's successful we could well be seeing some worthy RPG foes at last. A good example of this will be when you kill a particularly powerful enemy. If the fallen character happened to be wielding a massive power sword of death at the time – as boss types tend to do – then others around him will squabble over who claims his weapon rather than battling on in a rather futile manner.

Also, enemy healers will actually heal their fighters when needed. It's still amazing how many enemy groups we've come across that refuse to perform a basic heal function when we know full well that they're capable of doing so. This AI may even stretch as far as primitive emotions, with some monsters becoming envious of others that have better armour and weaponry. It's certainly an interesting prospect if it can be implemented in the correct way.

Titan Quest looks promising at the moment and, from what we've seen of the title thus far, it certainly shows that not all of our attention should be focused on the next generation of consoles. If the potential of this game is fully realised then this could really offer up something that brings us the looks, playability and multiplayer experience that we're all looking to the next-gen machines to provide.

Of course, this could also go the other way and the theme and genre that have both been bled to death over the last year could well begin to show a few cracks, leaving *Titan Quest* in the shadow of the many recent successes. Here's hoping that we don't end up disappointed.

GIFT OF THE GARB

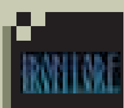
Those keen on their Greek and Egyptian legends are likely to see many familiar sights when *Titan Quest* finally reaches us. As well as the locations and monsters that fill out the myths, there will also be weapons and armour available that some of the more studious among us will be familiar with. In fact, we've been promised a selection of legendary equipment that will number into the thousands – enough for even the most fashion-conscious adventurers. That said, you really wouldn't expect much less from an RPG nowadays.

> "TITAN QUEST SHOWS THAT NOT ALL OF OUR ATTENTION SHOULD BE FOCUSED ON THE NEXT GENERATION OF CONSOLES"



There's no way you can fight monsters without a bit of magic to help you – it's not the done thing.

Some giant is bound to smash this little village up any time now. We'll end up cheering, no doubt.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Founded in October 2000 by Brian Sullivan (co-creator of the extremely successful *Age Of Empires* series) and Paul Chieffo, Iron Lore is making its debut with *Titan Quest*. However, with this sort of experience at the helm, we're expecting more greatness from the studio in the future.

HISTORY

TITAN QUEST IS THE FIRST TITLE FROM IRON LORE

Yes, we are going to say that this is a bridge too far. We simply have to…

Titan Quest is certainly looking a picturesque little title. Makes you craves the simple life, eh?

"OUR PRIMARY GOAL FOR TITAN QUEST IS TO CREATE AN EXPERIENCE THAT BLENDS THE BEST OF ACTION, ROLE-PLAYING AND ADVENTURE GENRES"

BRIAN SULLIVAN, PRESIDENT, IRON LORE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ALL GREEK TO US

AGE OF EMPIRES - HISTORY + CLASH OF THE TITANS = TITAN QUEST

CALL OF DUTY 2



"CALL OF DUTY 2 DELIVERS AN UNPARALLELED PORTRAYAL OF THE CHAOS AND INTENSITY THAT WAS WORLD WAR II"
ACTIVISION PRESS RELEASE

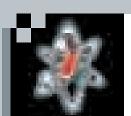
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

DUTY CALLS

CALL OF DUTY x XBOX 360 + HALO = CALL OF DUTY 2

"You wanna know what I smell? I smell victory in the tip of my gun."





DEVELOPER PROFILE

Infinity Ward is a specialist developer entirely devoted to the *Call Of Duty* PC market – it's not even responsible for the home consoles' *COD: Finest Hour*, or the forthcoming *COD: Big Red One*. The studio is famously built from the remnants of the original *Medal Of Honor* team, and determined to push its vision of the Second World War to the top of the FPS tree.

HISTORY

CALL OF DUTY 2003 [PC]



"Hey, Archie – if you listen really carefully you can hear the sea."

"Abort! They have no moustache combs. Repeat, there is NO moustache comb."

IT WOULD BE RUDE NOT TO ANSWER

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Infinity Ward
RELEASE: Q4 '05
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-16

CONCEPT

A second outing for Activision's wildly successful World War II FPS, and another glimpse at the power and potential of the Xbox 360.

Picture the D-Day landing in *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* – the flying debris, dust clouds erupting with every explosion, the screams of your colleagues as they fall under German fire. Now forget it. The equivalent scene in *Call Of Duty 2* blows it so far out of the water that EA's effort may be overlooked when Channel 4 gets Jimmy Carr to host 'The Top 100 Unforgettable Game Sequences'.

The gaming community is concerned that next-gen consoles will provide titles with a higher graphical quality but gameplay that's only equivalent to current-gen titles. However, the visual improvement in *COD2* provides so much more than just a top-up in resolution. *Call Of Duty* has always been about the intensity and cameraderie of battle, and the raw power of top-end PCs; importantly, the 360 is providing a suitable canvas for Infinity Ward to paint its depiction of war.

The first noticeable difference is the sheer clarity of the graphics. The detail is amazing, from the muscle movement in soldiers' faces to the weather effects and ferocious explosions that engulf your surroundings. In fact, at times you'll have to squint to make sure it's not real – the draw distance and long-range detail is so impressive that the game looks like a movie. These aesthetic qualities provide an immersion that takes the game to the next level. The game is very intense, and even in the few levels the feeling of being amidst a hideous war is conveyed superbly (as much as our limited experience of full-scale conflict tells us, anyway).

Once again, the game depicts specific WWII battles, dropping you in the boots of English, Russian and American soldiers through a series of nicely implemented and relevant objectives. Although you're part of a squad, *Call Of Duty 2* doesn't allow you to control your team, instead it lets the game's AI fight for itself, which it does very well. An excellent addition is the new 'Battle Chatter' system whereby your team-mates shout in real time about events on the battlefield (see 'It's good to…'). Interestingly, it will be possible to stick with each soldier in turn and play out their story until its finale, or play the whole game in the order that events happened. Nice to see a bit of user customisation in a single-player game.

No matter how beautiful, horrifying and intense *Call Of Duty 2* is, none of this would matter if the core FPS mechanics were shot. Thankfully, combat is as smooth and action-packed as before, with a nice mix of tactical 'cover-whoring' and running blindly into enemy territory blasting everything in sight. Also, the Xbox 360's pad handles excellently, with the new shoulder buttons making ol' Black and White seem a bad idea. Which they were.

A few bugs still need ironing out – now and again the scenery goes all *Halo 2* and draws in layers of detail as you approach, and there are moments where the game slows down. Playing the 360 version on a 40-inch HDTV with 5.1 surround sound didn't harm the game's immersion factor; hopefully the sense of being surrounded by a living hell, fighting for every inch of territory and for every last breath, will be conveyed just as well on a more modest set-up. Still, this is shaping up as a potential classic.

"AT TIMES YOU'LL HAVE TO SQUINT TO MAKE SURE IT'S NOT REAL – THE LONG-RANGE DETAIL IS SO IMPRESSIVE THAT THE GAME LOOKS LIKE A MOVIE"

IT'S GOOD TO…

Remember what *Halo*'s chatty soldiers added to the experience? Well, *Call Of Duty 2*'s Battle Chatter system takes this to a new level. At its simplest, it's exciting to hear the banter between your team-mates, but Infinity Ward hasn't created this system for show. Soldiers react verbally to everything that happens in the field; from an incoming grenade to the position of a stealthy sniper, you can rely on your comrades to bail you out. It's useful when one of your team shouts 'tank', as no one enjoys an explosive shell to the back of the head. Hopefully, continued play won't uncover excessive repetition in the dialogue, as it's currently highly enjoyable.

TRAUMA CENTER: UNDER THE KNIFE

■ The main character will progress up the ranks as a surgeon throughout the game.

いつも通り…
冷静に、敏速に、手術を始めます！

"NURSE, THE SCREENS!"

There's no denying that the DS's touch-based control system adds a certain degree of immediacy to its games. However, *Trauma Center: Under The Knife* makes use of this immediacy in the best of ways. Playing it necessitates a huge degree of accuracy, concentration and dexterity, both mental and manual; you use your stylus for everything from routine cutting open and stitching up to zapping parasites with a laser and delicately re-attaching veins. *Trauma Centre* is one of the most absorbing and challenging games we've played on the DS, and it makes perfect use of the system's unique abilities.

Despite a slightly more arcadey approach compared to *Kenshui Tendo Doktua* (the DS's other surgery-related game), *Trauma Center* also has a very involved storyline, as there's considerable dialogue between each operation that you – a young surgeon – perform. The main character progresses from city to city performing increasingly involved and advanced surgery, forming rivalries along the way. And you won't just be operating on people either – in one level we even used our skills to defuse a bomb.

As the surgical operations become more involved, the game, in turn, becomes infinitely more absorbing. Trying to remove tiny shards of glass from a patient's heart without sending him into arrest requires total concentration and considerable skill. However, such complex operations will not occur until quite far into the game; several tutorial levels introduce the player to the intricacies of stitching, slicing and laser treatment. The action is extremely tense, too – the heart-stopping moment (no pun intended) when a patient flatlines really puts your reflexes and resolve to the test.

"TRAUMA CENTRE IS ONE OF THE MOST ABSORBING AND CHALLENGING GAMES WE'VE PLAYED ON THE DS"

Looking at the screenshots, *Trauma Center* may appear a bit graphic for the faint-hearted. In reality, though, only the most squeamish gamers will find it difficult to deal with. The game is more about the challenge of succeeding at each individual puzzle than a simulation of actual surgery. What's more, the graphics are fairly abstract, so *Trauma Center* won't alienate those of us who go green at the sight of a paper cut.

Undoubtedly then, *Trauma Center* is dynamic, involving and very, very challenging – once Nintendo gets around to releasing it over here (some time early next year, supposedly), it deserves to be a big hit.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Nintendo DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Atlus
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '06 (US: 18 Oct)
GENRE: Puzzle
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ A surprisingly intense quasi-puzzler where the player must operate upon a variety of progressively worse-off patients.

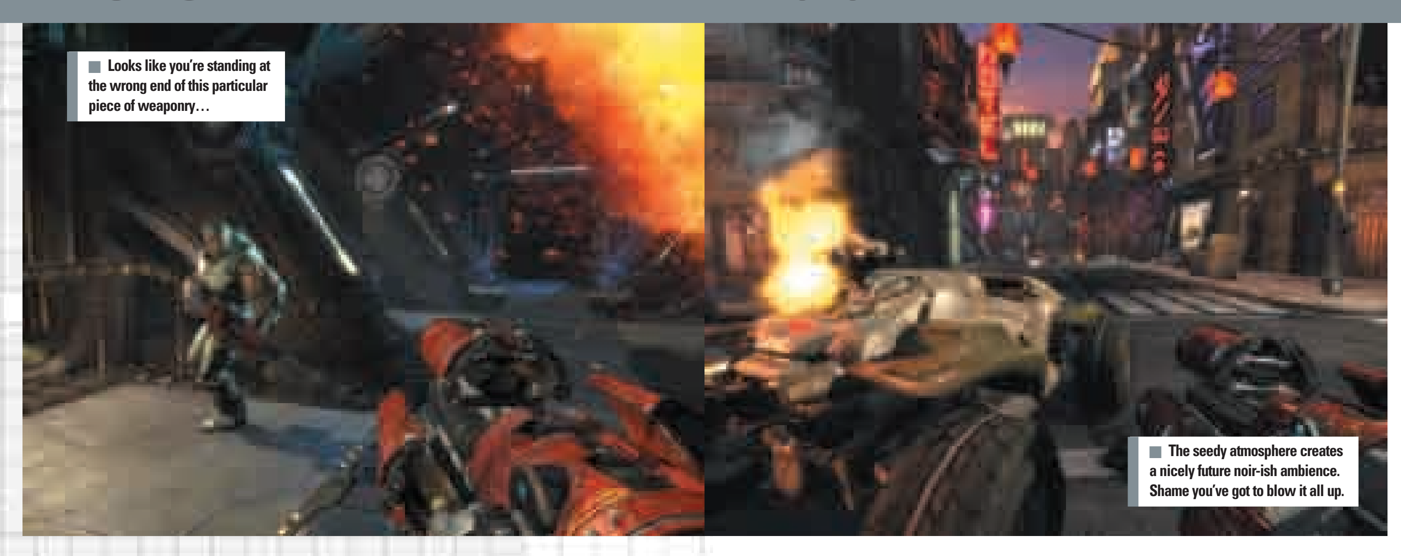


■ A variety of tools are at your surgeon's disposal, from needle to scalpel to suction.

■ Some of the operations are extremely pressurised, requiring quick but careful work.


eMag

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007



Looks like you're standing at the wrong end of this particular piece of weaponry…

The seedy atmosphere creates a nicely future noir-ish ambience. Shame you've got to blow it all up.

YOU BETTER BELIEVE IT

Thanks to Xbox Live, it's never been easier to jump into an online grudge match with a group of friends. Competition in videogames is at an all-time high, with even the unskilled 'n00bs' being unafraid to turn up and take a few pot shots at you. It's become a mainstream form of play and this is going to become even more apparent with the launch of the next-gen consoles.

Of course, it's been possible to play in this manner for a long while. Even as far back as 1999 – when a dial-up modem was considered acceptable – there were those of us who were fragging, sniping and camping during tense *Unreal* battles. The game was great then, and, while it's occasionally left out features that we loved, it's retained the excellent multiplayer experience with every sequel.

We've now reached a point where we can actually begin to get excited about the arrival of the 2007 addition without then getting disappointed at how woefully far off it is, and – as you can no doubt see by the screenshots that are spattered around these pages – it's looking mighty impressive.

A recent chat with Epic has filled in many of the gaps regarding the title and revealed several details that have served to whet our appetites further. *Unreal Tournament 2007* will be looking back to some of the elements of the 1999 version to create the intense conflicts that have been slightly softened over the years.

Complementing the improved computer AI, the screen-wide, bounding dodges that were seen in the last instalment will be ditched in favour of the delicate sidestep that we saw many years ago, providing a more skilful evade rather than one that sees you leaving the room. Furthermore, aside from the default, no melee weapons will feature – something which we feel that those sick of being repeatedly killed by whichever person has the Power Sword in *Halo 2* will appreciate most. Although the lack of close-quarter weapons is now common knowledge, the exact list of firearms hasn't been revealed and Epic is still 'tweaking' to get the balance right; we're sure all the favourites will be in there somewhere, though.

As far as modes go, there's likely to be few surprises for those familiar with the series. The obligatory Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch are guaranteed, and the One-On-One mode will also be available for those who don't trust other players or just have a personal score to settle. One of the casualties will be the Domination mode. Apparently the least popular mode in the *Unreal* series, it's almost certain that it won't be making an appearance, though something called Conquest looks as if it will be stepping into its place.

If there's one thing that the *Unreal* series does exceptionally well, it's looking after its players. The community that has built up around the games is huge and this latest instalment looks likely to offer even more in the way of incentives. The ever-popular Make Something Unreal events will once again be judging and distributing the creations of those who've managed to master the included Map Editor, and improved matchmaking and downloadable extras have also been promised.

It's all sounding very grand at the moment, but the sooner we get to stop watching videos and actually get some time online with *Unreal Tournament 2007* the better. We're looking forward to this one.

"2007 WILL LOOK BACK TO THE 1999 VERSION TO CREATE THE INTENSE CONFLICTS THAT HAVE BEEN SOFTENED OVER THE YEARS"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Midway
DEVELOPER: Epic
RELEASE: 2006
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: TBC

CONCEPT

Get online with your friends once more for some FPS action… and attempt to show them that you're still unbeatable.

THE LIVING DEAD

It's obvious that *Unreal Tournament 2007* will be delivering a hefty nod in the direction of some of the older titles in the series, so it really comes as no surprise that it looks as if some other old tricks may be making an appearance. Many of us remember the Jump Boots with much fondness, but it's the Fake Death move that we're most interested in. It was always an effective manoeuvre in the games it featured in, but this was before the days of rag-doll physics. Now, with bodies flopping all over the place upon death, it'll be a little more difficult to make them spring to life again when a foe is lured closer. What a surprise, though, eh?



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Based in Raleigh, North Carolina, and established in 1991, Epic Games creates games and development software. Although best known for titles such as *Unreal* and *Unreal Tournament*, Epic is indirectly responsible for *Splinter Cell*, as the stealth title used the company's Unreal engine.

HISTORY

■ **UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2** 2005 [Xbox]
■ **UNREAL TOURNAMENT** 1999 [Multi]
■ **EXTREME PINBALL** 1995 [Multi]

■ Yeah, yeah, quite the hard man. But how's he going to manage if he gets an itch?

"UT2007 WILL BE A MAJOR EVOLUTION FOR THE UNREAL SERIES. FANS WILL BE BLOWN AWAY BY THE NEXT-GENERATION GAMEPLAY, MODIFIABILITY AND VISUALS"
STEVE ALLISON, CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, MIDWAY

■ It's the kind of downtown scene beloved of violent types. So start shooting…

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

WE'RE GONNA PARTY

UNREAL 1999 + INTELLIGENCE x SKILLS = UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007

CITY OF VILLAINS



"OUR PLAYERS AREN'T REALLY EVIL, BUT JUDGING BY THE DEMAND, THEY DEFINITELY WANT TO PLAY EVIL"
STEPHEN REID, CONTENT AND COMMUNITY MANAGER, NCSOFT EUROPE

Now this certainly beats those poncy superhero capes.

"Shall we duke it out, old chap? I'm about ready for a bit of rough and tumble."

CITY OF VILLAINS
PC



DEVELOPER PROFILE
■ Cryptic Studios is located in San Jose, California, and was established in July 2000. After beating NetDevil to the idea of a superhero MMORPG with the superb *City Of Heroes*, the company has come on in leaps and bounds and is now attempting to build on the fine foundation it's created.

HISTORY
■ CITY OF HEROES 2004 [PC]

A WHOLE NEW MEANING TO THE WORDS 'VICE CITY'

There was a time when playing the hero would have been enough for anyone. Rescuing maidens was what men once lived for and, although it may have meant taking on a barrel-throwing primate, we cheered as villainy was crushed beneath our mighty fists. Now, though, things are different. Games like *Destroy All Humans!* and *Evil Genius* have proved that we have an equal, if not greater, lust for evil and that games allowing us to perform acts of wickedness tend to fly off the shelves. And so, *City Of Villains* was an obvious second move for *City Of Heroes* developer Cryptic. Rather than your righteous types, you'll now assume the role of your own evil-doer and, in a similar way to *City Of Heroes*, build your way up to greatness.

Many thought this would be little more than an expansion pack. Thankfully, these people were wrong… well, mostly wrong. *City Of Villains* will be a stand-alone experience and it's currently looking set to impress. Although the experience is likely to be similar to *Heroes*, the improvements are obvious. A new range of classes and moves have been implemented and the environments look better than ever, but the real difference will be in how you play.

It's been made clear to us that the way in which the villains fight will differ greatly to what we saw from the heroes. Bad guys are more individual and aren't as concerned about teamwork, apparently, and the way teams will take on foes reflects this; the classic system we've used in MMORPGs in the past is unlikely to work quite as well. It also means more twists in the story, as those of evil ilk are more than a little fond of backstabbing, which may lead to some interesting gameplay developments.

Those who've spent time progressing through *City Of Heroes* will also benefit. Whether you're a hero or a villain, it's always nice to have your own hideout where you can kick back, relax and keep any enemies at a distance. Unfortunately, it was a feature that would-be heroes had to learn to live without and, while players in other MMORPGs were lounging in their Guild Halls and the like, the heroes were forced to remain out in the open. It was very sad. Now though, with the introduction of *City Of Villains*, this property ownership is finally a possibility, as this game will function as both a stand-alone title and an expansion for *City Of Heroes*.

Existing *Heroes* players will automatically gain access to a base-building tool and Cryptic has already said that it aims to "make these bases as customisable as the characters themselves". Once you have a base, appointments can be made to give other groups a chance to break into your pad and steal your valuables. We can see this new mode leading to some epic clashes, but this won't be the only extra on offer. *City Of Heroes* users will receive three new player-vs-player arenas where they can meet *City Of Villains* players and indulge in a true battle between good and evil.

It certainly seems that Cryptic is going about this sequel the right way. It would have been easy to stick to the winning formula that caused *City Of Heroes* to be such a success and merely switch the do-gooders with some darker characters, but the studio seems to have learnt some valuable lessons from its first game and is using this experience to create a title that's not only likely to appeal to many of those who missed out on *Heroes*, but also looks to provide a smoother and more involving game. We guess it really is good to be bad…

"CRYPTIC SEEMS TO HAVE LEARNT SOME VALUABLE LESSONS FROM ITS FIRST GAME"

DETAILS
FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: NCsoft
DEVELOPER: Cryptic Studios
RELEASE: Q4 '05
GENRE: MMORPG
PLAYERS: Massively Multiplayer

CONCEPT
■ Forget the heroes – this time you control the forces of evil and work against truth and justice to earn the favour of Arachnos.

ARE YOU EXPERIENCED?
Good things come to those who wait, and the team at Cryptic are obviously keen to prove this. When *City Of Villains* launches you'll be treated to 40 missions to work your way through and with each success will come a well-earned rise in your experience. To start with, the level cap will be 40, but ten extra missions will soon follow giving you access to the coveted L50. As it happens, we're reliably informed that only five per cent of players ever reach the level cap in most MMORPGs – and we're planning to be in that five per cent this time around…



■ The character customisation options will be even greater than they were in *City Of Heroes*.

SSX ON TOUR



Although skis open up a new selection of tricks to use, they're not much different to a board.

EA has adapted the game's style to snowboarding culture, making for a more authentic experience.

ROCKING ALL THE WAY DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

PS2 **The *SSX* franchise appears to be getting a bit of a facelift.** Where the first three games were (broadly) similar in visual and musical style, *SSX On Tour* is quite different, incorporating a funked-up, bizarre new artistic direction involving, among other things, cool little line-art drawings of beavers and unicorns playing guitars on the loading screens. In-game, the visuals are more conventional, but it's still looking good; the shimmering slopes are populated by civilian skiers and boarders as well as racers, and the game copes very well with the high speeds and fast action. It's all certainly very eye-catching – although, as always, the real test is in how it plays, not how it looks.

As *SSX 3* fans, we felt right at home once we hit the slopes in *On Tour*. The controls are tight, the speed is considerable and the trick system hasn't undergone any dramatic changes. The main change is the system of progression; in *SSX On Tour* you must guide your avatar through numerous individual and competitive challenges in order to earn them a reputation on the mountain. Competing in Shreds earns you the right to take part in medal challenges against other, more notorious sportspeople, thereby boosting your reputation.

There's a definite emphasis on player choice in *SSX On Tour*, from the new character-customisation feature to the non-linear progression in Career mode. At any time, several challenges are available for the player to undertake at his discretion. The Shred challenges themselves are extremely diverse – we were challenged first to a simple race, but before long were trying our hand at air-time, grinding and trick challenges, some of which really tested our neglected *SSX* skills. Making it to a one-on-one challenge with one of the mountain's stars is reasonably easy at first, but as each boss character has a different set of skills it's essential to quickly adapt your play style in order to defeat them.

Perhaps the most encouraging thing about *SSX On Tour*, though, is its diversity. Due to the enormous variety of challenges and the customisation feature you (rather than the game) determine what you do, leaving plenty of room for the development of individual playing styles. There's also a new measure of freedom in the tracks – the mountain is seamless and cohesive, so that you'll switch between individual tracks as you complete challenges. Though this feature was present in *SSX 3* it seems there's an even greater emphasis on exploring the mountain this time around.

What's more, players now have the choice between skiing and snowboarding. Though choosing skis didn't appear to have an enormous effect on how the game played at this stage in development, it's hoped that people will play through the game once on a snowboard and return to it to play on skis, or vice versa. Each has a different set of tricks, but the same character can use either at will.

Certainly, *SSX On Tour* doesn't appear to be an enormous departure from *SSX 3* in terms of gameplay… but we wouldn't necessarily like it to be completely different considering the quality of the last one anyway. The new style, visual polish and other minor tweaks should be more than enough to bring fans back to the series, as well as open it up to a new audience of gamers too. The only question really is where EA hopes to take the series from here.

"THERE'S AN EMPHASIS ON PLAYER CHOICE, FROM THE NEW CHARACTER CUSTOMISATION TO THE NON-LINEAR PROGRESSION"

DETAILS

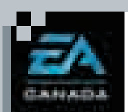
FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, Cube
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: EA Canada
RELEASE: Nov '05
GENRE: Extreme Sports
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

EA's famous *SSX* franchise returns with a striking new look – strapping planks to your feet and hurtling down a mountain has never been so much fun.

CREATE YOUR OWN

Rather appealingly, *SSX On Tour* encourages the player to create his or her very own boarder or skier to take through the single-player game's challenges. Though the create-a-player mode is hardly the most comprehensive we've seen, it still allows a satisfactory level of customisation – so whether you want to create a much cooler approximation of yourself or throw an effigy of your worst enemy down a mountain, the opportunity is there. Players will also be able to choose a 'persona' for their rider that affects their appearance, although further tweaking is perfectly possible. There are also a number of returning characters from *SSX 3* and, if rumours are to be believed, a few special unlockable ones too.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ *SSX On Tour*, along with the rest of the *SSX* series, is an in-house EA production – and a good one too. EA's Canadian development studio employs more than a thousand people so its development history is considerable. EA Canada also handles the popular *Need For Speed* franchise, but we won't hold that against it.

HISTORY

■ **DEF JAM FIGHT FOR NY** 2004 [Multi]
■ **SSX 3** 2003 [Multi]
■ **NBA STREET** 2002 [Multi]

"SSX ON TOUR IS A COMPLETELY FRESH TAKE ON THE SSX FRANCHISE"
STEVE BARCIA, SENIOR PRODUCER, EA

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

STYLISTIC SNOWBOARDING

SSX 3 + RAWK 'N' ROLL x LINE ART = SSX ON TOUR

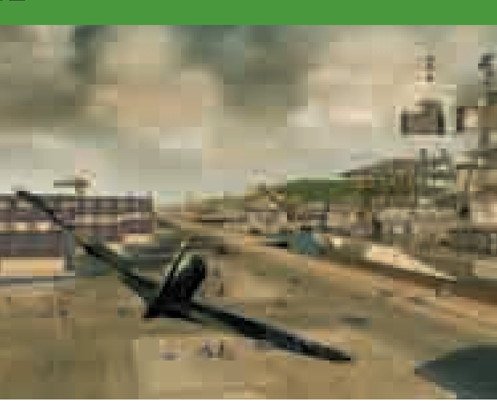
■ Tricks are the staple diet of any *SSX* gamer – pull them off and watch your points go flying up.

BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WWII





Obviously, being on the ground isn't much use. After all, planes want to be in the air.



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Romania
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Nov '05
GENRE: Shoot-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1 (2-20 Online)

CONCEPT

A pick-up-and-play aerial shoot-'em-up is hardly a new concept but thanks to Ubisoft any average Joe can do his bit in the battle of Pearl Harbor with the minimum of effort. Lovely.

THE REAL WAR OF THE WORLDS

Google is brilliant. If this preview had been written after a couple more pints of gin, we could easily have begun telling you about how *Blazing Angels* is a game about American '18 & Under Gold Fastpitch Softball' due to a simple clicking mistake. We can see Ubisoft being particularly pleased with us confusing a bunch of sporty schoolgirls with its upcoming World War II shooter.

Lucky for us, then, that we saved the gin-a-thon for a different day and – on this occasion – were able to differentiate between fighter planes and teenage girls. Phew. Then we realised that we might as well play the game just to confirm content. So yeah, anyone looking for phrases like "bottom of the ninth" will be disappointed.

Picking up where Microsoft's enjoyable *Crimson Skies* left off, Ubisoft's latest non-Clancy offering is an aerial combat affair with one foot firmly planted in reality while the other waggles its toes in the paddling pool of fantasy. You see, while the planes and settings have been painstakingly recreated, gameplay couldn't be simpler. Easy-to-use arcade-style controls mean even unco-ordinated pilots will be able to dance about the skies and turn enemy fighters into showers of fuselage and debris. Wave after wave of bogeys pour into the beautiful settings as you swoop under bridges, around buildings and even perform loops, sweeps and rolls to clear the skies in the most stylish manner that Forties technology can facilitate.

With 20 missions spanning some of the most famous aerial battles of the war (including, according to the press release, fierce fighting for the "desserts" of North Africa – tasty) and wingman control à la *Rogue Squadron*, *Blazing Angels* will provide a decent spread of single-player adrenaline fixes.

"MAKE SURE YOU KNOW YOUR 'TALLY HO' FROM YOUR 'CHOCKS AWAY' READY FOR SOME LIVE BANTER"

But it's the multiplayer potential that really gets us excited, taking us back to a time when the *Crimson Skies* servers weren't just populated by a couple of shouting children who obviously picked up the game for a fiver and didn't really know what they were doing. Still, with its straightforward gameplay and always-popular WWII setting, we're really hoping *Blazing Angels*' lobbies will be bustling with wannabe heroes come November. Rumours of a softball mini-game cannot yet be confirmed. Possibly because we just made them up. Oh well. We can dream, right?



Zooming through the air isn't nearly as hard as you'd think…

…but hitting the enemy takes a fair bit of practice.


eMag

TYCOON CITY: NEW YORK



All your dreams of building an empire can now – sort of – come true.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

CITY OF HEROES

SIM CITY + THE SIMS x FRIENDS = TYCOON CITY: NEW YORK

"VIEW THE REACTIONS OF THOUSANDS OF NYC CITIZENS, EACH WITH INDIVIDUAL TRAITS AND TASTES"

ATARI PRESS RELEASE

Envision a skate park. Build a skate park. Then sit back and enjoy the fruits of your labour.

TYCOON CITY: NEW YORK
PC



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Milton Keynes-based developer Deep Red has been solely focused on the sim genre during its eight years of output. It was responsible for the wildly successful *Monopoly Tycoon* and hopes to achieve mainstream success with this Big Apple-based world builder.

HISTORY

- **VEGAS TYCOON** 2003 [PC]
- **SPRING BREAK** 2002 [PC]
- **MONOPOLY TYCOON** 2001 [PC]



■ See the world the way you want to see it – be it a bird's-eye view or a slightly more contoured landscape.

EVERYTHING CAN CHANGE IN A NEW YORK MINUTE

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Deep Red
RELEASE: Nov '05
GENRE: Strategy Simulation
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ A new tilt on the world-building sim – one with incredible scope and scale, and a whole heap of personality.

The name *Tycoon City: New York* doesn't really start pulses racing. City-building games are notoriously mundane, generally executed with skill and finesse but lacking the spark to ignite the fire in most gamers' hearts. However, to dismiss Deep Red's latest effort would be irresponsible. *Tycoon City* looks to fuse elements of social simulation, character interaction and city design to create something unique.

The scale of *Tycoon City* is incredible; perhaps the only parallel it has is *Katamari Damacy*'s scaling effect. It's possible to view the entire city from a bird's-eye view, then zoom in to the individual people strolling through Times Square. Each person can be highlighted, *Sims* style, and their needs, wants and happiness assessed. There are a phenomenal 64,000 characters inhabiting New York, each with their own names and desires. The player must work out what the city's population wants for their living space, and then build it for them. Happy people spend money. You make a profit. All is well.

However, none of this clears up the confusion surrounding the game's premise. How can you build a city that already exists? *Tycoon City* is split into 13 districts, each with their own 'vibe'. These districts are unlocked as you make more money developing the existing sections. Initially, New York is an empty playground with little more than a few apartment buildings and a handful of civilians. Starting in Greenwich Village, home to those Friends, you must develop the area, taking care of what the inhabitants want. As the district develops, the game's AI automatically builds residential buildings and the population of the area grows, along with its wealth. Make enough money and you'll unlock 'landmark' structures like the Empire State Building or the Chrysler Building.

Like *The Sims* but on a huge scale, *Tycoon City* focuses more on people and social management than construction. Something Deep Red has concentrated on is ensuring that its version of New York feels like New York and not New Milton Keynes. The developer has hired artists, scriptwriters and voice actors from the city to get the correct feel. Deep Red also wants the player to be able to notice a tangible difference between the districts. Building a shop in Chelsea, for example, will lead to a grand-looking building with avant garde architecture and classy décor. Build the same store in downtown Harlem, however, and the building will again reflect the area – more functional, slightly grimier, lacking the elegance of the Chelsea equivalent, but serving an identical purpose.

What Deep Red is trying to achieve is commendable. The firm's aware that there's a solid and established market for traditional city sims, but is intent on pushing the boundaries. The words 'living, breathing city' are used ad nauseam in this industry at the moment, but one look at a Times Square brimming with the amount of people usually seen on Oxford Street on a Saturday, and the words have never been truer. This looks like a genuinely interesting and exciting product, and perhaps will be the game to push social simulation – that isn't *The Sims* – into the mainstream consciousness.

"YOU CAN VIEW THE CITY FROM A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW, THEN ZOOM IN TO THE PEOPLE STROLLING THROUGH TIMES SQUARE"

IN THE HEART OF THE CITY

The element that sets *Tycoon City* light years ahead of its competition is the level of interaction its inhabitants have with their surroundings. On a basic level, you can clearly see who's happy and who isn't from their posture – cheery folk walk tall, whereas depressed civilians trudge around slumped over like Johnny Vegas with a hangover. Brilliantly, civilians are aware of structures and amusements that the player has built. A good example was a skate park constructed on Chelsea pier – a skater left his apartment, strolled across town to the park, got out his skateboard and ground up the halfpipe for an hour, before grabbing a drink at a vending machine and making his way home. Bear in mind that there are another 63,999 people all acting individually, and that on its own is a huge achievement.



"WE REALLY TRIED TO MARRY TOGETHER THE BEST ELEMENTS OF THE LAST TWO GAMES TO CREATE THE BASE UPON WHICH WE'VE ADDED THE INNOVATIONS"

BEN MATTES, PRODUCER, UBISOFT

IT REALLY IS A GAME OF TWO HALVES

PS2 **We've followed the Prince's adventures for a long while now.** From way back, when the main causes of his frequent deaths were little-bit-too-far drops and spike-based traps, right through to his first dealing with the Sands of Time as a bright youngster and then his sulkier persona in *Warrior Within*, it's been a hell of a journey, but now the end of the tale seems to be well within sight.

The Two Thrones is the final instalment of the trilogy and it's looking to mix things up. After being stamped with the unsightly moniker *Prince Of Persia 3* for far too long, the game has finally adopted *The Two Thrones* as a suitable subtitle. "It really plays off the dichotomy of the game," producer Ben Mattes tells us. "The game will feature both the Prince and the Dark Prince this time around and the name ties in with that. Which will win? Which will gain the throne? Some people have played *Sands Of Time* and say 'this is the Prince – he's good, he's nice, he wants good things for his people and family'. Others play *Warrior Within* and end up saying 'no, this is the Prince. Ruthless and generally not a nice guy'. This time around, we will answer the question once and for all – which is the real Prince?"

Although the *Warrior Within* Prince was noticeably moodier, it was easy to believe that this was just evolution as a result of all the hassles he'd endured. Hey, he'd earned the right to throw the word 'bitch' around, surely? Now, for the first time, two playable characters will feature as these personalities split the Prince in two.

"The Dark Prince is the visible manifestation of the Prince's weakest personality traits," Mattes explains. "The two have very different personalities; Dark Prince is ruthless, reckless and also very selfish. His ambitions for the city of Babylon and the throne are not necessarily those of the Prince who's aspiring towards something more heroic and better."

Although the characters from the two games have been brought together in an effort to make this the most involving game in the series, a quick peek at these screenshots will reveal that the locations have more in common with the vibrant *Sands Of Time* than the far bleaker *Warrior Within*. The key reason for this is that the whole game will take place in your hometown of Babylon. In fact, the game is set just hours after *Warrior Within* finishes, with you arriving back only to be greeted by a destroyed city. "We chose a return to ▷

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, Cube, PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '05
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

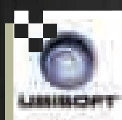
CONCEPT

Take control of the Prince one last time, embrace your dark side and find out exactly how this epic tale ends.

HISTORY

Ubisoft has used the current generation of consoles to bring the *Prince Of Persia* franchise into glorious 3D, transforming it into a series that does the original 2D adventures proud.

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES



PUBLISHER PROFILE

The ever-growing Ubisoft has managed to provide a stream of quality titles over the years and the introduction of next-gen machines is likely to see it expand further. The company now has offices in 21 countries and sells its titles in more than 50 countries around the world.

HISTORY

- **MYST V** 2005 [PC]
- **RAINBOW SIX: LOCKDOWN** 2005 [Multi]
- **SPLINTER CELL** 2002 [Multi]



Implementing the Speed Kills into the game is a great way to breathe life into tired stealth sections.

the lighter artistic direction for various reasons," says Mattes. "It didn't make sense to have the city of Babylon being a dark environment – it was the home of the King after all. Before the attack it would have been pristine and we wanted to remind the player of this. That's not to say that it's completely returned to the almost fairy tale-esque artistic direction you saw in *Sands Of Time*, though – there are many *Warrior Within* influences. You'll see raging fires, destroyed buildings and plenty of other darker undertones."

Of course, the city of Babylon hasn't fallen by the hand of any old foe. Again it's the Sand that's responsible and this time it finds a way of possessing the army that was protecting the city. It's a little different this time, though, as instead of taking over the bodies of the soldiers, the Sand works as more of an infection, spreading itself over only the areas that need enhancing. This means stronger characters, such as the warriors, still look humanoid with the key differences being that their armour has been made part of their flesh. Due to this partial takeover, all the combat skills and abilities that a trained soldier would have will be retained, creating a new breed of enemy for the Prince to face.

"IT'S LOOKING QUITE LIKELY THAT THIS COULD BE THE PERFECT SEND-OFF FOR THE PRINCE"

"The idea is that this enemy army that's occupied the city is made up of skilled fighters," Mattes explains. "They're not the same fodder that we saw in *Warrior Within*, that the Prince could tear through with ease. Each enemy can now prove a significant challenge for the Prince. When he's fighting at his weakest state – say, with a dagger – the combat will be difficult. Players will yearn for a better weapon, or the use of the Dark Prince and his Dagger Tail, so they can devastate enemies a little easier."

When we said that *Two Thrones* was mixing it up we weren't kidding. This is looking to be everything the two previous games were and then some. "You could say it's a hybrid," Mattes offers. "We really tried to marry together the best elements of the

WHEELED WARRIORS

Between battles you will race to each new destination on a stolen chariot, avoiding collapsing pillars and leaping through waterfalls. However, Ubisoft is keen to point out that these haven't been implemented as 'racing sections' but rather as atmosphere-building pieces that give you a break from the norm. "We wanted a single gameplay element that really communicated a key emotion of the game – the idea of the Prince being hunted," Ben Mattes explains. "He's always on the move, always being pursued. You really get the feeling that you're being chased while you're enjoying these sections."



These chariot sections are set to improve the overall feel of the game rather than forcing you to compete.

IN TWO MINDS

After being partially infected by the Sands of Time, the Prince will sport a damaged arm with the dagger blade firmly embedded within it. Though he can keep his calm through most situations, when negative emotions start to surface the new Dark Prince will become controllable. These two are certainly going to be tough to choose between…

LIGHT

This is the Prince that we all know and love from the first game in the series. Agile and acrobatic, his motives are noble and he must suffer the pain of the Dagger Blade that has been burned into his arm. Aside from the new Quick Kill system and a batch of new techniques, this Prince will work in a similar way to what we've seen in previous titles. He'll still have Dark Prince inside though, and the voice of his shadowy doppelganger will echo loudly in his mind when he's up against a particularly tough opponent or facing an obstacle that requires the unique skills of the Dark Prince.

DARK

With a masochistic nature, this version of the Prince will simply rip the Dagger Blade out of his arm and use it as a rather nifty weapon. This is the version of the Prince we saw starting to emerge in *Warrior Within*, but now, with the Sand infection taking hold, he's darker than ever. The Dark Prince will have a whole new set of offensive moves and, although he'll have access to Quick Kills in the same way as the Prince, he's far more capable when it comes to fighting numerous enemies and is likely to be used for his fighting abilities rather than his Speed Kills.

"THIS TIME AROUND, WE WILL ANSWER THE QUESTION ONCE AND FOR ALL – WHICH IS THE REAL PRINCE?"

BEN MATTES, PRODUCER, UBISOFT

DARK SIDE PROFILE

It's not just *Star Wars* titles that allow you to dabble with a dark side. Being able to venture into an evil world or control a tainted version of your character is an idea that's caught on – and many games are all the better for it.

HISTORY

- **THE SUFFERING: TIES THAT BIND** 2005 [Multi]
- **JAK 3** 2004 [PS2]
- **ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME** 1998 [N64]

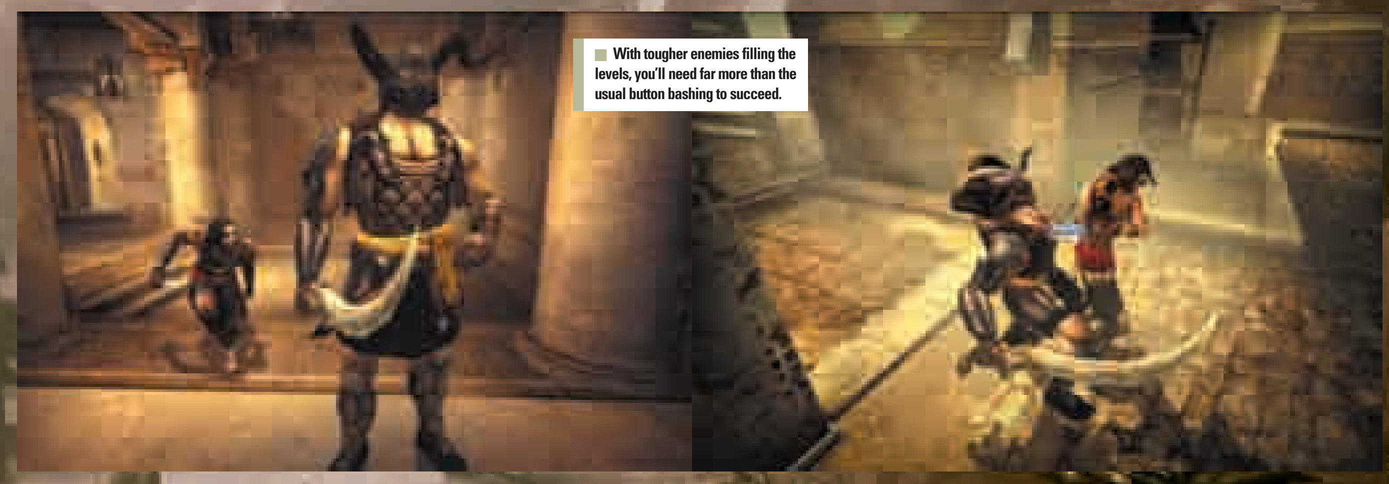
Dark Prince makes even the great Ivy look like a novice when it comes to Dagger Tail usage.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

TORN BETWEEN THE TWO

WARRIOR WITHIN + MORE SAND x PERSONALITIES = THE TWO THRONES

"Come back here, I just want your extra time and your… kiss."


With tougher enemies filling the levels, you'll need far more than the usual button bashing to succeed.

two to create the base upon which we've added the innovations."

Ah, innovations. They're the key to a successful trilogy. By the time you reach the third title, there's always a chance that you'll have used up all your ideas, so it's important to keep a few back for the grand finale and, as Mattes puts it, "make the players feel that they're not just getting an expansion pack". Aside from the whole extra character, the key difference between this and the other titles is the introduction of the Speed Kill system. "This is the ace up the Prince's sleeve," Mattes tells us. "He doesn't rely solely on his combat skills, but hybrids them with his acrobatic skills and uses his agility and acrobatics to arrive at an enemy before it has time to react. He can take them by surprise and unleash a high-risk, high-reward combo system called the Speed Kill system. The player can use this new technique to kill an enemy instantly, allowing him to move on through the level unhindered."

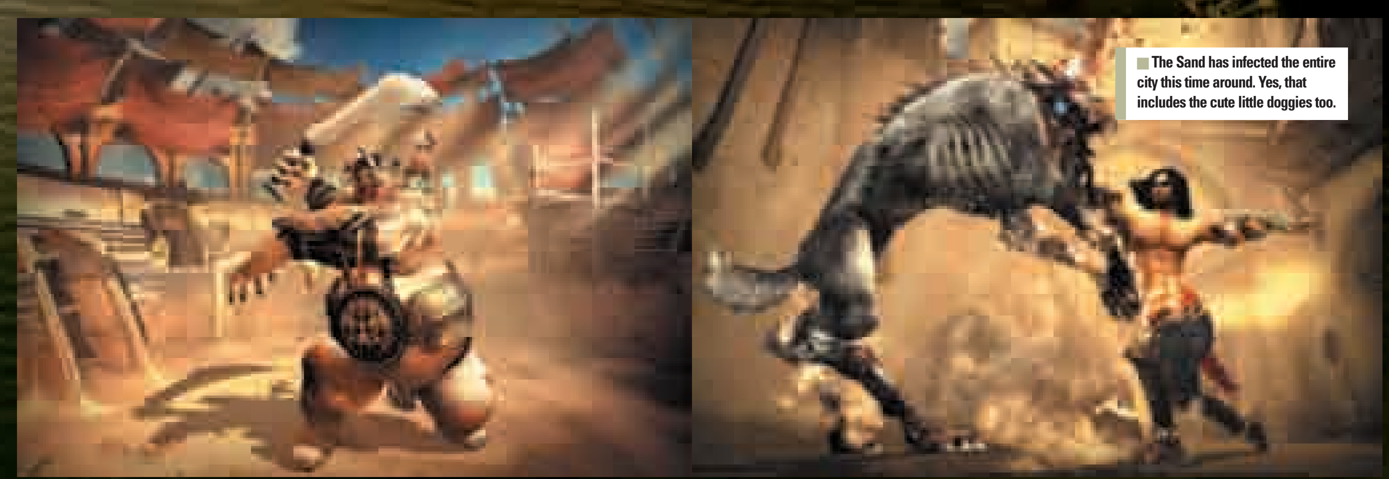
At a glance, this could be dismissed as the now painfully predictable stealth element that nearly all games feature, but fears of this are quickly dispelled once you've seen them in action. Rather than the simple one-hit fatality that you'd expect, Speed Kills consist of a series of prompted button presses that will see you perform an impressive death-dealing combo which will result in a quick, damage-less victory if you are successful. The satisfaction of launching into one of these while still in the air after a series of wall-runs and vaulting is more than impressive, and we're fairly sure that, as the game progresses, there's going to be some serious skill required to get the most from this new element.

"THE CHARACTERS FROM THE TWO GAMES HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TOGETHER IN AN EFFORT TO MAKE THIS THE MOST INVOLVING GAME IN THE SERIES YET"

It's looking likely that this could be the perfect send-off for the Prince, but we'll save any real judgement for when we get our hands on review code. For now, we'll just make do with looking at how pretty it is.

WHO'S THE BOSS?

Something that *Sands Of Time* was really missing was bosses. Your aim then was more to do with conquering the various environments than beating down some large monster type and this made the game feel like a continuous journey rather that a segmented mission. We didn't mind too much, but the introduction of boss battles in *Warrior Within* was certainly welcome and we were equally pleased to find that they would be returning in *Two Thrones*. The bosses this time will be the Generals that were leading the army that was supposed to be protecting Babylon. Of course, Sand has infected each of them and they're far more hideous than they were in their human form. From what we've seen so far, they're certainly looking impressive.


The Sand has infected the entire city this time around. Yes, that includes the cute little doggies too.

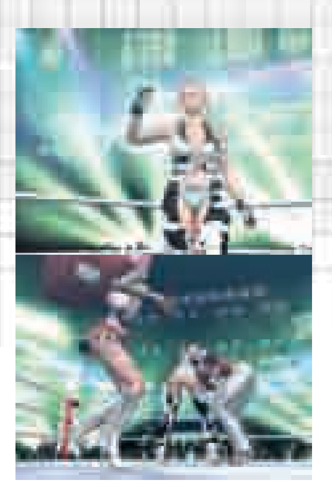
SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

RUMBLE ROSES XX

QUEEN OF THE RING

Format: Xbox 360
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Genre: Beat-'Em-Up
Players: TBA



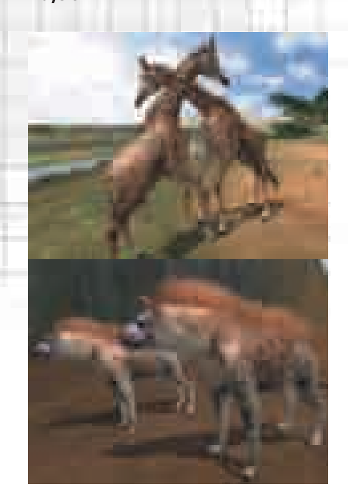
Everybody's favourite Konami-developed wrestling game that features scantily clad women is back, finding a new home on the Xbox 360. Expect more of the same gratuitously big-bosomed grappling as in the original game, but with an upped polygon count that will really set the teenage boys' hearts racing. The second game in the series will feature two-on-two tag-team matches that can be played over Xbox Live, no doubt designed with the 360's Spectator mode in mind. Also expect smoother animation, expansions to each character's move-set, and an increased volume of all things smutty. Whether the gameplay can match Yukes' *Smackdown!* series remains to be seen.

RELEASE: TBA '06

WILD EARTH

NOT ACTUALLY THAT WILD, REALLY

Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Digital Jesters
Developer: Super X Studios
Genre: Safari Simulation
Players: 1



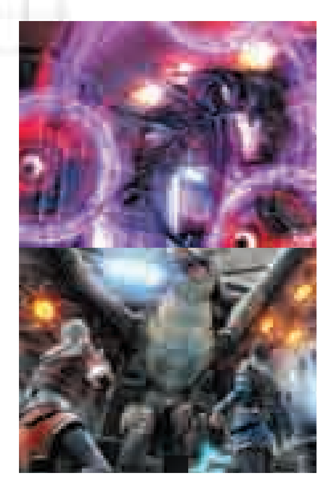
Here's something a little different. *Wild Earth* is a safari simulation, allowing players to travel around the Serengeti National Park photographing all manner of indigenous flora and fauna. Digital Jesters is proudly touting *Wild Earth* as a non-violent videogame, attempting to appeal to those jaded by a market drowned in 'me-too' ultra-violent videogames. *Wild Earth* will have a far more sedate pace than most other titles on the market and, if done properly, could prove particularly interesting. Of course, whether taking snapshots of elephants is the way to do it is another matter. If it can capture the essence of the quirky *Pokémon Snap*, however, then we'll be more than happy.

RELEASE: NOV '05

eNCHANT arM

IT'S A BIG WORLD OUT THERE

Format: Xbox 360
Origin: Japan
Publisher: From Software
Developer: In-House
Genre: RPG
Players: 1



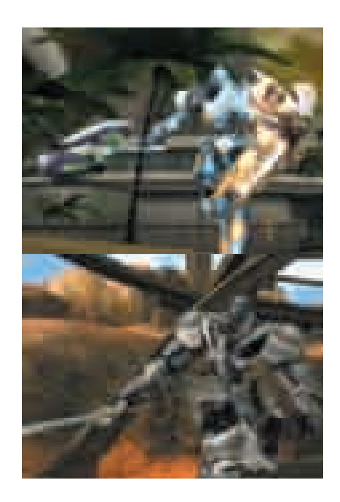
This incredibly pretty RPG comes from the people who brought us – among other things – *Otogi 2*, one of the best-looking games of the current generation. The story takes place in the phenomenally huge Yokohama city, an environment of a size and scale usually associated with MMORPGs, and one that's brimming with detail. From Software is keeping its cards close to its chest concerning the game's combat system, but we wouldn't be surprised to see an evolution of a traditional turn-based system. As we move into the next generation, RPGs will continue to increase in scope, and the curiously capitalised *eNCHANT arM* looks like an early contender for the Xbox 360's must-have RPG title.

RELEASE: TBA '05

RF ONLINE

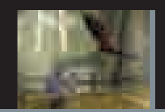
MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER MECHS? MMM…

Format: PC
Origin: South Korea
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: CCR Inc.
Genre: MMORPG
Players: Massively Multiplayer



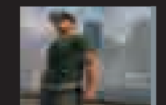
As the MMORPG craze really takes hold in Europe, companies are trawling the studios of South Korea trying to find the next big hitter. *RF Online* may well fit the bill. The game's main selling point is its enormous skirmishes that pitch literally thousands of online users against one another in epic combat. Visually the game already looks stunning, mixing sprawling environments with highly detailed character models; throw a few mechs into that mix and it's understandable why there are already over a million subscribers in Korea. *Guild Wars* and *World Of Warcraft* have the UK MMORPG market cornered at the moment, but *RF Online* definitely has the potential to muscle in on their territory.

RELEASE: Q1 '06



DELAYED – Zelda: Twilight Princess [GC]

■ **Shigeru Miyamoto's latest *Zelda* epic has slipped from this year's Christmas release list. This is most likely to make sure that the Cube's last great title doesn't get lost in the festive rush.**



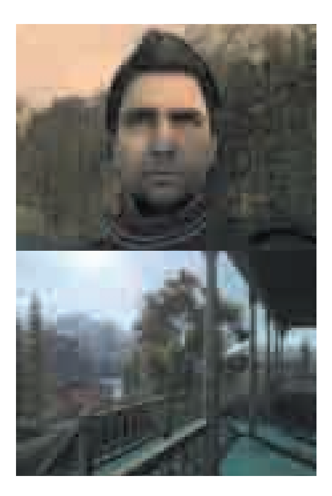
DELAYED – Saints Row [Xbox 360]

■ **Vivendi's next-gen pretender to *GTA*'s throne has been pushed back to early next year in order to ensure the game maximises its potential. A good sign, surely, as too many free-roaming *GTA*-style titles feel rushed.**

ALAN WAKE

KNOWING ME, KNOWING YOU

Format: Xbox 360, PS3, PC
Origin: US
Publisher: TBA
Developer: Remedy Entertainment
Genre: Adventure
Players: 1



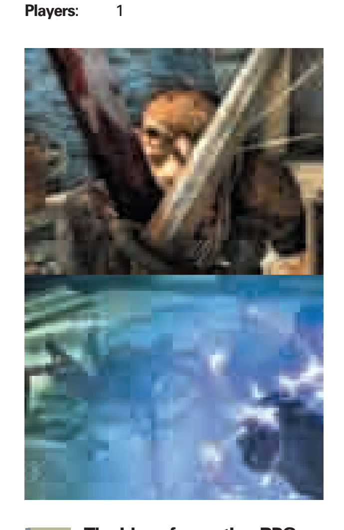
The name *Alan Wake* might not set hearts racing, but one glance at the screenshots is sure to whet any gamer's appetite. Looking every bit the next generation, *Alan Wake* is an evolution of the point-and-click genre, starring Wake, an everyman and author. Things start to go wrong for Alan when the creatures in the horror novel he's working on begin manifesting themselves physically. Cue mystery, intrigue and a few scares, all playing out among some of the most beautiful environments we've ever had the pleasure of seeing. Definitely one of the most sought-after next-generation titles, it will be interesting to see if the gameplay can match the sumptuous graphics.

RELEASE: TBA '06

DARK MESSIAH OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

HE'S NOT THE MESSIAH…

Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Arkane Studios
Genre: RPG
Players: 1



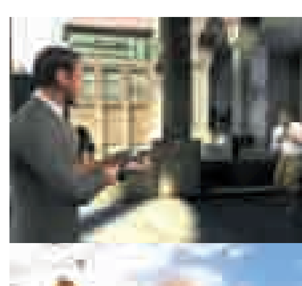
The idea of an action RPG played out in the first person and powered by Valve's immense Source engine sounds very appealing. *Dark Messiah* is hoping to be that game. Essentially it's all about character development, the staple of the RPG genre; but instead of pushing the player down a linear path the game lets them mould their character in their own image – much like in *Fable*. Graphically, the game looks stunning, and the Source-powered physics will provide some awesome magical effects. This game is bursting with potential and could prove to be one of the must-have PC games of the next 12 months. Hopefully, in the year that's left for development the Source engine won't be outdated by next-gen physics engines.

RELEASE: Q3 '06

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

NOT UNDERCOVER ANY MORE

Format: PS2, Xbox, Cube
Origin: US
Publisher: EA
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action
Players: 1







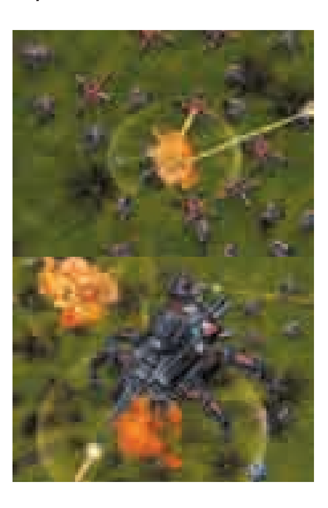
A lovingly rendered Sean Connery lolls around cracking off one-liners like only he can in EA's latest Bond-'em-up, *From Russia With Love*. The game loosely follows the plot of the film of the same name (only Bond's second cinematic outing) allowing artistic licence for some stealth sections and car combat. And, er, Natasha Bedingfield. From the people who brought you *Everything Or Nothing*, expect the usual EA 'cram everything in'-style adventure, aimed squarely at the mass market. At the moment, it doesn't look like much more than a graphical improvement on *Everything Or Nothing*, but time will tell if the gameplay shows more depth than its predecessor.

RELEASE: OCT '05

SUPREME COMMANDER

AS IF TOTAL ANNIHILATION WASN'T ENOUGH

Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Gas Powered Games
Genre: Real-Time Strategy
Players: TBC



THQ has signed up with Gas Powered Games to produce *Supreme Commander*, a spiritual sequel to the excellent *Total Annihilation* games, and we're expecting battles on a much grander scale and full control over every detail of war. If Gas Powered Games can once again find the creative spark that gave birth to *Total Annihilation*, then *Supreme Commander* could really raise the bar for real-time strategy gaming. The early signs are extremely promising, with some highly detailed troops and vehicles filling the screen, acting out as brutal a war as has yet to be seen in RTS gaming. This could just be the perfect partner to THQ's forthcoming World War II RTS, *Company Of Heroes*.

RELEASE: TBA

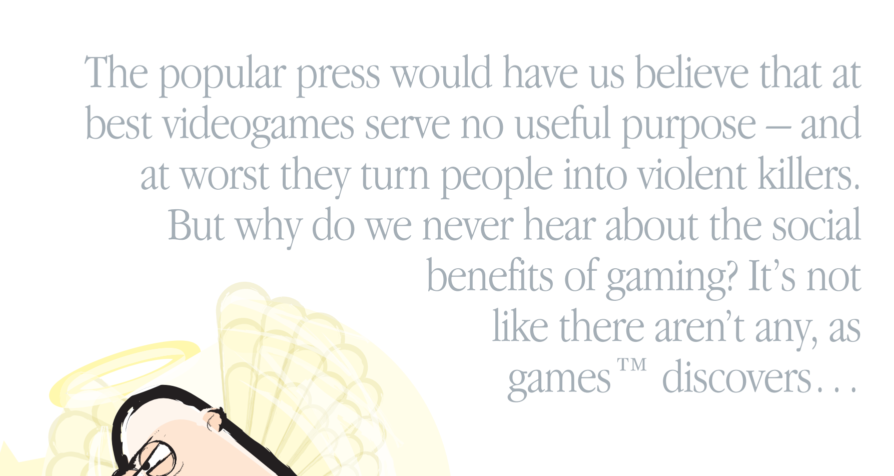




And we thought being turned into a dragon was bad… **Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap – Master System [Sega] 1989**


games...
hope...
& charity

The popular press would have us believe that at best videogames serve no useful purpose – and at worst they turn people into violent killers. But why do we never hear about the social benefits of gaming? It's not like there aren't any, as games™ discovers…



As every gamer will know, games are widely viewed in the media as a social evil. Week after week we read stories about the havoc the games we play are inflicting on society. Recently we've had the furore over the *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* 'Hot Coffee' mod that allows players to access sex scenes. Then there was the story of an 11-year-old boy who stabbed his seven-month-old nephew who wouldn't stop crying while he was playing on his PlayStation. And then the South Korean man who died after a non-stop 50-hour stint playing *StarCraft*. Even a magazine as sober as *The Economist* has got in on the act with a cover story looking at the impact of videogaming. (That said, although it was headlined 'Breeding Evil?' the feature was fair and balanced, which made a pleasant change.)

But while the media gets het up about the evils of gaming, a lot of the good games do goes unnoticed. This autumn, for example, will see gamers raising money for charity through a series of gaming tournaments called Trueplayerz. Gaming party company Joystick Junkies runs the events, the idea stemming from the firm's desire to show that you don't need to be a geek to play games.

"At Joystick Junkies we're trying to create fun, mainstream, lifestyle events," explains Chris Birch, the company's creative director. "The idea with our competitions is it's about the people, not about being the best."

The roots of Trueplayerz originated in a one-off game contest that raised funds for those affected by last December's tsunami in south Asia. Encouraged by that event's success the firm decided to make its charity events a regular event. The first Trueplayerz event was held back in May and Joystick Junkies are preparing to hold several more before this Christmas.

"The players pay £5 to play and each competitor nominates a charity," explains Birch. "If the player wins then the charity they chose gets the money." The May event, held in east London, raised £150 for environmental charity the WWF. "All the money paid by the players goes to the charity, the costs of running the event are covered by sponsors," explains Birch. Broadband supplier UK Online and ▷

"THIS AUTUMN, GAMERS WILL RAISE MONEY FOR CHARITY AT A SERIES OF GAMING EVENTS"



Health Warnings

Games make you fat and unhealthy, right? Maybe, but not necessarily. An increasing amount of research into videogames is undermining the stereotypical image that games are as beneficial to health as Osama Bin Laden is to world peace. There is some evidence of games improving players' hand-eye co-ordination and, according to a recent report in the British Medical Journal, a growing number of cases where games have helped patients recover from illness. The emergence in recent years of dancing games, EyeToy and other 'active' videogames may also challenge the unhealthy gamer stereotype. That said, it must be admitted that there remain significant amounts of evidence that excessive game-playing can have side effects such as triggering seizures in epileptics or leading to repetitive strain injury or similar conditions.

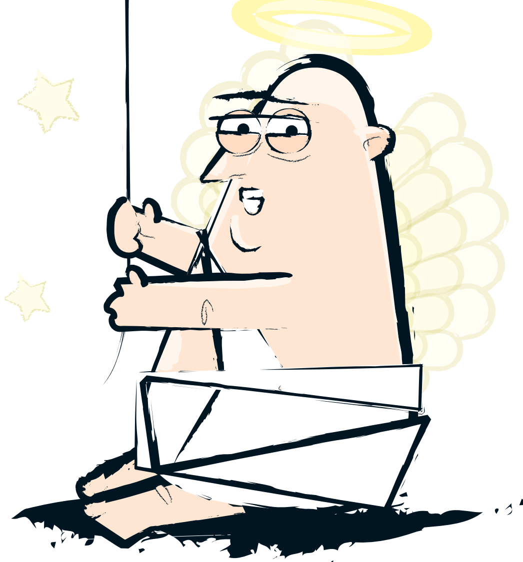


Apart from the odd smashed vase after a wayward kick, how can all this exercise not be good for you?



The likes of *San Andreas* haven't helped convince sceptics of the value of gaming.

Gamestation are helping put on the next two Trueplayerz events, which will be held at London's Marquee Club on 23 October and 20 November. And as before the events will aim to be as accessible as possible. "It's not about who's best – even if you're crap at games you can still have fun and help raise money for charity," says Birch. "All the events use consoles – no PCs. We want it to be fun, social and a pleasant experience."



Birch hopes the autumn events will raise around £1,000 each and he's already planning to take Trueplayerz on tour around the UK.

It Begins At Home

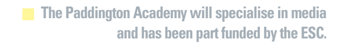
The UK games industry has also been a keen charity donor through the Entertainment Software Charity. Founded in 2000 by several industry figures, the charity concentrates on funding efforts to improve the educational achievement of Britain's poorest children. Each year the charity raises around £750,000 from the UK games industry using a combination of fundraising events – such as a recent golf day and a sponsored climb of Mount Kilimanjaro – and special games compilations. The compilations contain games donated by leading game companies and all the profits go to the charity. Typical of the charity's packs is last year's *ESC 04*, a £29.99 PlayStation2 compilation containing *Midnight Club*, *Rayman Revolution* and *Pitfall: The Lost Expedition*.

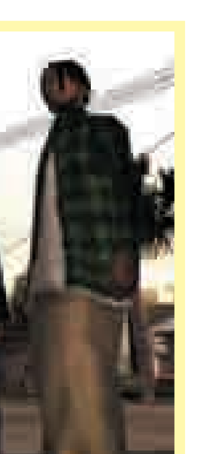
Since its formation the charity has bankrolled a variety of work but its biggest is its £2 million investment in the Paddington Academy, one of several failing schools across England the government is knocking down and rebuilding to help turn it around. The charity's donation even prompted a message of support from Tony Blair. "We put in £2 million and the academy gets another £25 million from the government," says Mark Strachan, the charity's chief executive officer. "It's a lot of money and I am so proud that the industry is backing this. These schools are the ones that are failing the most and there is a spiraling decline of hope among the pupils there."

"THE CHARITABLE WORK OF THE ESC HAS EVEN PROMPTED COMMENTS FROM TONY BLAIR"

Like all the academies being built around England, the Paddington Academy is effectively owned by the local community and isn't controlled by the council. It's also not required to follow the national curriculum thereby giving the academy the freedom to devise its own teaching regime. The industry's involvement in the Paddington Academy, however, consists of more than simply writing a large cheque.

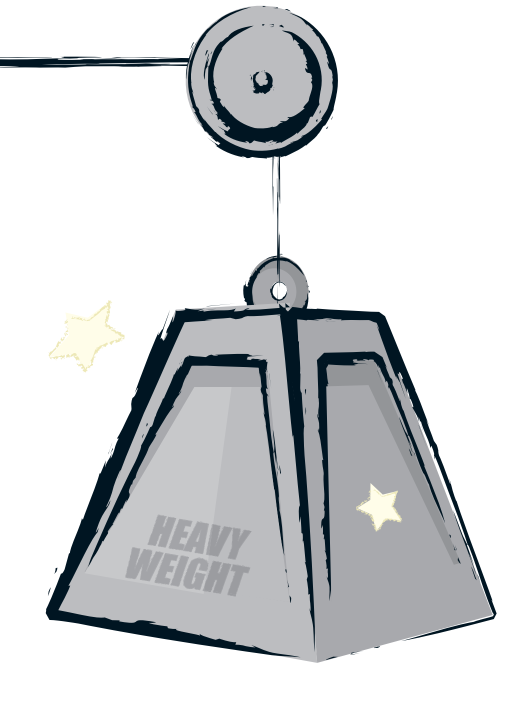
"We're putting together a team of people from the industry to give masterclasses to the children so they can learn about creating game graphics and to provide work experience for them," says Strachan. "I also want someone from the industry to become a governor of the school." The videogames industry link also helps get the schoolchildren excited about the changes, he adds. "We're an industry the children





The Paddington Academy will specialise in media and has been part funded by the ESC.





associate with and these kids love the idea that this industry cares about them."

Easy access

Another good cause benefiting from ESC's money is the ACE Centre Advisory Trust, an Oxford-based charity that develops controllers that allow severely disabled children to play videogames. Nick Streeter, fundraiser at ACE, says that the significance of allowing disabled children to play videogames can't be underestimated. "The aim of our gaming project is to create a 'level playing field' which, via computer games, will allow young people with disabilities to excel, learn, be creative, have fun and beat their big sister at something," he explains. "The current situation is one where children with disabilities are deprived of the opportunity to experience games enjoyed by able-bodied children that could not only assist their education but also enhance their quality of life."

So far ACE's GameOn! project has devised new ways for disabled children to play games, including one device where the child wears an infra-red controller on their forehead that allows the on-screen cursor to be operated by the child moving his or her head. The project is currently developing a device that will allow games to be controlled using eye movements alone. ACE is also putting together a website that will let disabled children and their parents know what videogames they can play and how they can be made easier to play. "Incredibly, no resource like this currently exists for disabled children," says Streeter. "These children would love to play the same game as their siblings and friends, but don't know how to or what games would be suitable." In addition, a website is being put together that will tell people which games work with specific disabilities.

Discover

But ESC's investments in schools are not the only way in which games are benefiting the education world. Stephen Hands has been using games for the last few years in youth clubs around the West Midlands to stop teenagers getting involved in crime, to teach them new skills and to prevent them getting excluded from school. His Learn Play Academy project has worked with four to five hundred young people during the past two years from its base in a Brownhills youth centre.

The project used the availability of games as a way of giving the teenagers something to do and a place to socialise. It also provided the young people with a means of discovering new interests or potential careers – be it making mods or developing an interest in history through historically themed games. The work has proved such a success that one Black Country headmaster is now getting Learn Play to run sessions in his school with pupils who are on the verge of exclusion.

"The youngsters I'm working with are all on the border of being excluded from school," explains Hands. "They are on-the-edge individuals and if they're not doing anything they can get frustrated. There's also a lot of domestic issues for them and in some cases maybe some drugs-related issues."

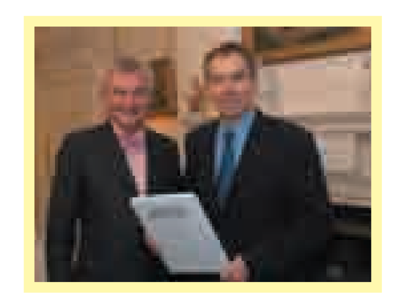
Using the appeal of games to get learners' attention Hands attempts to use various commercial games to teach them about particular subjects or, through multiplayer games, help them become friends with each other. Hands concentrates on using PC games because the level of adaptability and depth makes them more suitable to the work he does, and titles such as

"THE GAMEON! PROJECT HAS DEVISED NEW WAYS FOR DISABLED CHILDREN TO PLAY VIDEOGAMES"

Wristband Mania

With the craze for charity wristbands still in evidence, the Entertainment Software Charity is joining in with a gamer's wristband that will help it raise money for the work it does. The wristbands will cost £1 and will be available through Gamestation stores from October. According to Mark Strachan, the charity's chief executive officer, the wristbands will give game players a chance to raise money for the charity, which usually makes its money from fundraising events involving those working in the industry. "The wristbands provide a chance for gamers to give something back," he says. Four different coloured wristbands will be available, each designed to represent the console or computer owned by the wearer – blue for PlayStation, green for Xbox, purple for Nintendo, and red for PC owners.







ESC's Mark Strachan has taken the charity's fund-raising efforts all the way from the golf course to Downing Street.

Rome: Total War and *Rise Of Nations* have proved especially useful.

"*Rome: Total War* covers whole parts of the history curriculum. The students get to find out how the Roman Empire was set up and how it split in two. They can also find out about the kind of buildings the Romans had and so on," he says. "*1944: Battle Of The Bulge* is another as you can play as the British, Americans or Russians. One learner didn't realise Russia was involved in the Second World War, let alone know about Stalingrad and the lack of weapons among Russian soldiers there, but the game allowed him to find out about all of that."

In another case, playing text-heavy games like *Age Of Empires* highlighted one young person's need for help with reading and writing, and then while learning about trains the teenager mentioned he had never seen or been on a train before. Hands loaded up *Microsoft Train Simulator* to show him, and through a tutorial journey – which allows the player to look around but not control the train – the youngster was able to see what a train was like.

Learn Play is now planning to take the educational value of its work a stage further for the new school term by devising a series of history lesson plans all based around games. If successful, Learn Play's work may well help pave the way for a change in education policy. A couple of years ago, Becta, a government education quango, wrote a short report noting the potential of games in education and it is also providing financial support for ACE's GameOn! project.

Should Learn Play's schools-based work prove successful it could, coupled with Becta's demonstrated interest in the approach, provide the incentive the Department for Education and Skills needs to take a closer look at bringing games into the classroom. But, adds Hands, technology may hinder the spread of games-based teaching. "Schools are so far behind in technology I initially had to work with any computers and end up bringing in my own," he says.

Teachers' knowledge of videogames is another potential problem. "Teachers don't have the time to learn everything about games," he says. "To do this you need to be an expert on the gameplay side. Sure, everyone can be a gamer but that doesn't make you an expert about games and there are too few people out there who know enough to do this kind of work."

Corporate games

Schools, however, are not the only place where games are shaking up education. Increasingly, big business is harnessing the appeal and play-based approach of games to teach workers how to do everything from serve a customer to manage a factory. Computer-based training, or e-learning, has slowly been becoming more common in the business world but much of the material is dry and uninvolving. But in recent years the companies creating e-learning software have begun modeling their products on



"BECTA, A GOVERNMENT EDUCATION QUANGO, HAS WRITTEN A SHORT REPORT NOTING THE POTENTIAL VALUE OF VIDEOGAMES IN EDUCATION"

"COMPUTER-BASED TRAINING, OR E-LEARNING, HAS SLOWLY BEEN BECOMING MORE POPULAR IN THE BUSINESS WORLD"

videogames to help keep workers interested and to improve the educational benefits.

The military has been a keen user of game-like technology for training troops, the US military's use of *Full Spectrum Warrior* being one of the best known examples. Closer to home, UK developer Blitz Games is helping the UK's armed forces with their medical training by developing a game-style program that gives military medics a feel for treating the injured during a battle.

Martine Parry, director of corporate training consultancy Kezos, believes projects such as Blitz's show the potential of adapting game technology to corporate training. "Games are actually used in learning already quite a lot with young children, but the simulation potential of games could have uses in corporate situations," she says. "You could use game-type technology so the learner can experience what would happen in a real-life scenario in an immersive way."

One example, suggests Parry, could be training staff at nuclear power plants on how to handle crisis situations. Games companies are well placed to provide these kind of training tools to businesses although, says Parry, they do need to adjust to creating environments for learning rather than for fun. "The games industry does not understand that in the learning industry you need accuracy and measurable information, which is something you don't get when creating these systems for entertainment," she says.

But while Parry is enthusiastic not all of those involved in e-learning are convinced that gaming has much to offer. Vaughan Waller, an independent e-learning consultant, reckons much of the hype about game-based training is nonsense. "There's a lot of talk about how the younger generation of employees is familiar with videogames and therefore the training they're given should mirror that," he says. "I think that's a load of phooey myself. Of course training needs to be fun since if it's boring and dull we won't learn anything but that does not mean you have to have a game to do it."

Waller's scepticism of game-based learning is shared by some in the teaching profession as well, says Hands. "There's a lot of political issues around it," he says. "All a lot of people know about games is seeing reports about *Grand Theft Auto* this or that, which is all fantastic publicity for Take 2 but it isn't doing the industry as a whole any good. There has been a lot of scepticism about using games but I don't think it is the school's fault but the education system as a whole – it really needs to wake up to the potential of this type of alternative curriculum."

"The fact that the school I'm working with has taken this step is immense, it's just a shame there are too few like this at the moment," he adds.

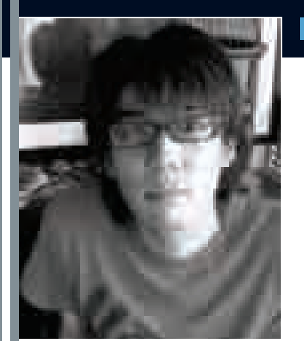
But for all this good work, videogaming will probably still have to endure – and occasionally revel in – its reputation as the bad apple of popular culture. The truth is that games do plenty of good, but will the world at large wake up to this fact? We'll just have to wait and see.







Projects such as GameOn! make games accessible to all, which can develop a range of skills in all players.



The Players

THE DEBUT TITLE FROM HIS NEW STUDIO MAY HAVE BEEN ABOUT ANCIENT ROME, BUT MASAFUMI HORIUCHI, FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF GOSHOW, HAS HIS FINGER ON THE PULSE OF MODERN GAMING…

MASAFUMI HORIUCHI

GOSHOW

When your first name means 'one whose name will grace the pages of history', you've got quite a lot to live up to. This, however, is a burden that Masafumi Horiuchi must carry – after spending a fair amount of time in character design, he's decided to try to make good on his name's promise and has started his own development studio, Goshow. "It's a completely exaggerated first name," laughs Horiuchi, who's just seen Goshow's debut title, *Colosseum: Road To Freedom*, garner favourable reviews. "I'm only the president of a still new and quite small development company. I thought I could go against the grain and create a more compact, efficient way of doing things and that's why I formed Goshow. Also, just so you know, when translated from Japanese, my last name means 'inside a castle's moat'."

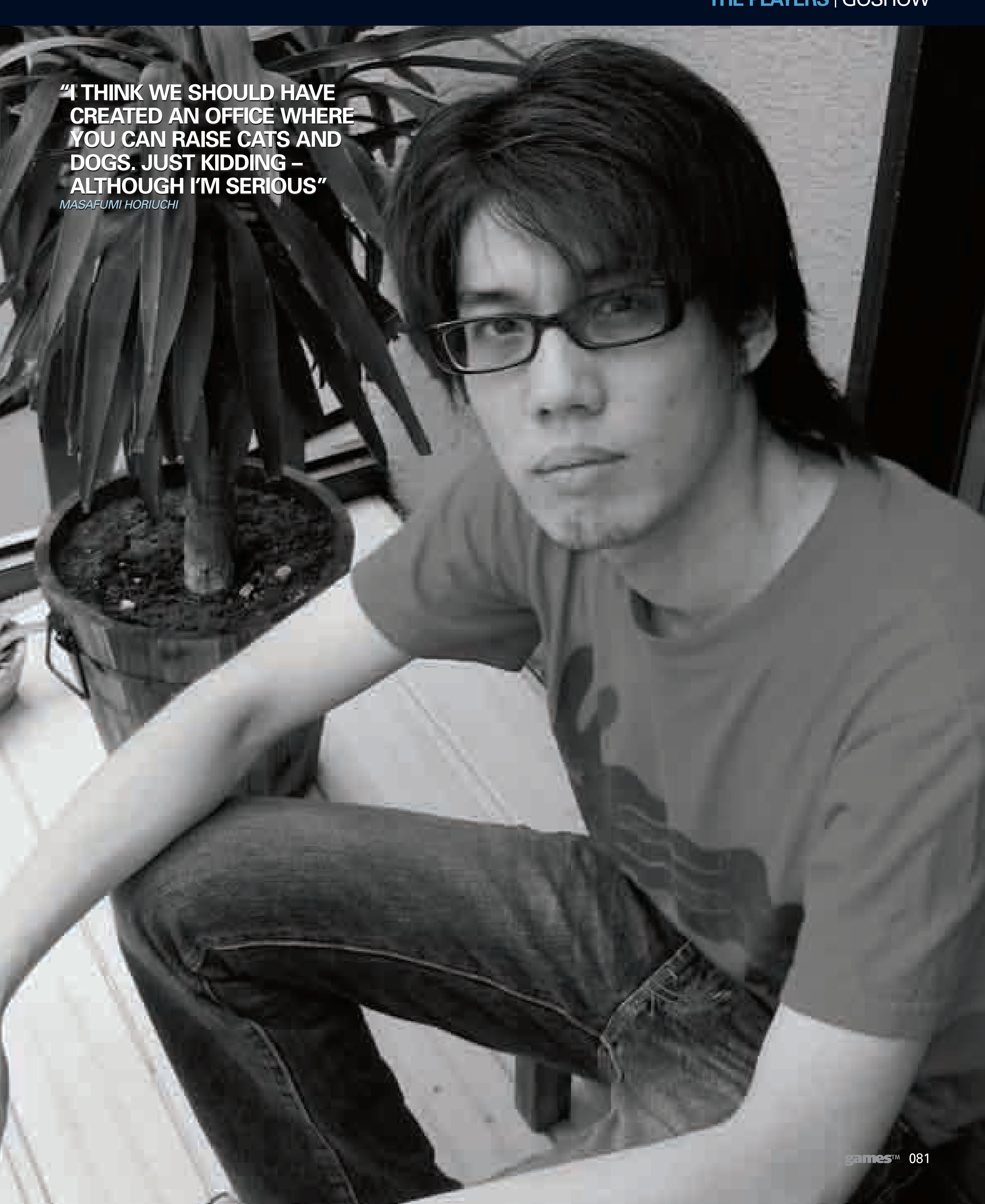
Even for a person with as much character and confidence as Horiuchi, setting up a new studio was never going to be easy. Developers face new problems every day, the most recent of which is the scrutiny of content following various 'slip-ups' (yes, Rockstar, we're looking at you). So when your game is concerned with slicing people up with Roman weaponry in the name of entertainment, there may be a few problems. However, it seems that this concern over content isn't as great in Japan as it is in other territories. The country has created its own game-rating board that attempts to make the ratings as clear as possible but ultimately trusts game stores and users to act in good faith. In fact, the board doesn't have any legal power at all.

"Maybe it's a Japanese cultural thing, but games that are overly violent are usually kept at arms' length," Horiuchi tells us. "So Japanese game developers tend to keep themselves in check. Actually, the worry is not so much toward regulating violent games as it is to regulating pornographic games. While developing *Colosseum*, I killed a scary number of in-game gladiators and, of course, I've never thought about doing such a thing in real life." Due to the shortage of modern-day gladiatorial types, we should think that this would be the case for most people, but would he allow his own child to take part in the carnage? "At first, I'd probably be against it," he admits. "But if my kid really wanted to play, I'd probably allow it for a little bit and then I'd talk about it. I'd discuss the world of the gladiators, of Ancient Rome and how the game differs from modern reality. If the child got some kind of mistaken impression from the game, I'd correct it."

Although *Colosseum* was created in Japan, it has a definite Western feel. The duelling gladiators and bursts of action are a million miles from the surreal *Katamari*-esque titles that some expect Japan to constantly produce and – upon meeting Horiuchi – it's certainly apparent that surreal is something Goshow would be capable of. "The fact that we have a lot of hand-to-hand fighting sports fans on the team definitely played a role in *Colosseum*," he informs us. "The fighters who step into the ring and put their bodies on the line for an audience are not so different from the battle-hardened gladiators from back in the day. Even when we're busy, if there's an important match we always gather around the TV. When the commercials come on we quickly scatter to our desks but once the match starts again we walk like zombies back to the television."

This hectic routine will now have ceased temporarily, as *Colosseum* is complete and out in the shops where it's introducing gamers to the joy of old-school combat. So once Horiuchi and the rest of the fight fans have let the dust settle from their debut title, what's next? Perhaps not another game just yet… "I think I'll go back to my home town," Horiuchi says with a smile. "Visit the grave of my dear departed dog, say hello to the family, go to an island in the south, become friends with the fish there, catch up on my stockpile of books, see some movies I missed, play a concert of all the music I have in my head, scribble on pieces of white paper, take long walks and let my imagination soar, play some games I've been wanting to play, and try to get a handle on the passage of time." Well, it looks like busy times ahead. We certainly wish him luck…

Colosseum: Road To Freedom is out now on PS2 and was reviewed in Issue 35.



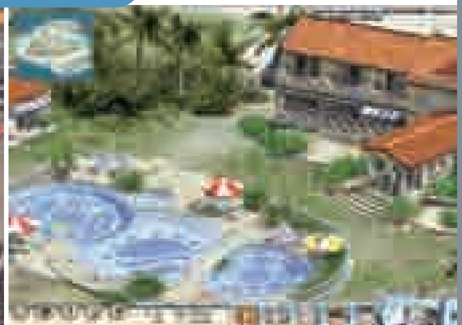
"I THINK WE SHOULD HAVE CREATED AN OFFICE WHERE YOU CAN RAISE CATS AND DOGS. JUST KIDDING – ALTHOUGH I'M SERIOUS"

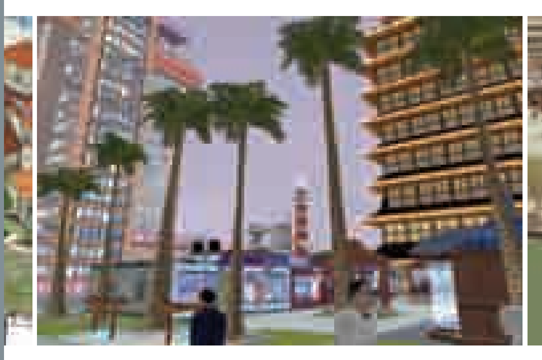
MASAFUMI HORIUCHI

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, games™ VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH WE VENTURE DEEP INTO MILTON KEYNES TO MEET DEEP RED GAMES.









DEEP RED GAMES



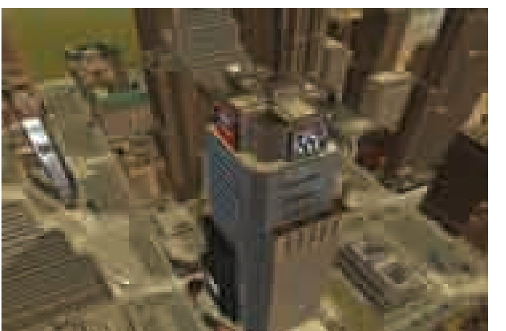
WITH SO FEW INDEPENDENT STUDIOS LEFT IN THE UK, IT'S COMFORTING TO KNOW THAT DEEP RED EXISTS. A STRONG, FOCUSED AND SPECIALISED TEAM, HUNGRY TO HANG ON TO ITS INDEPENDENCE, THE DEVELOPER IS LOOKING TO THE FUTURE. GAMES™ BRAVED THE CONCRETE COWS TO PAY DEEP RED A VISIT…

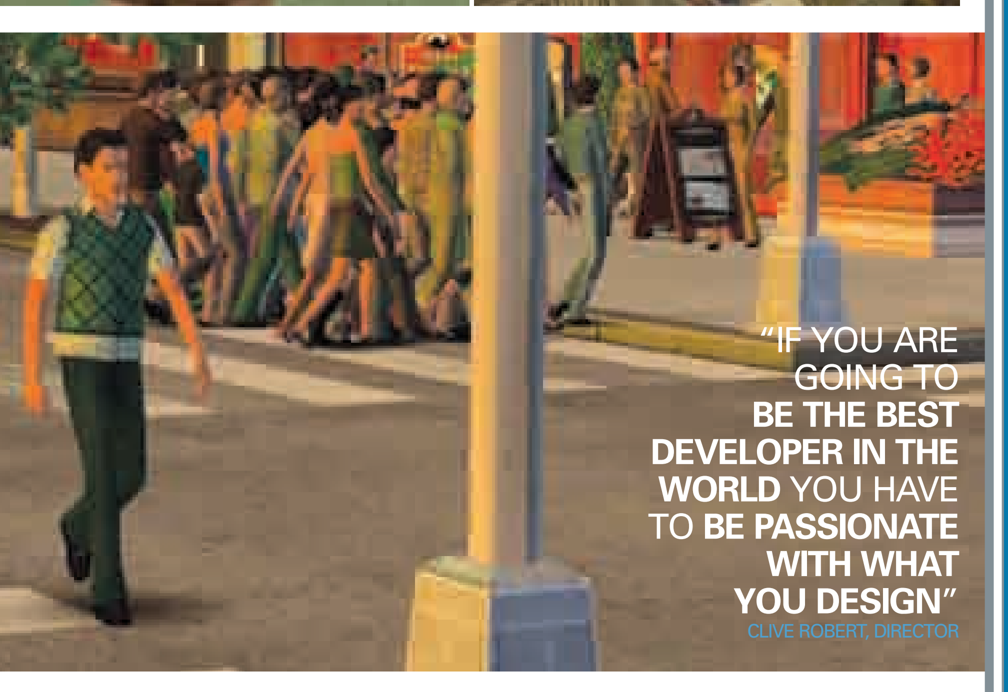
Development studios always look like comfortable places to work. Wide, spacious desks; high-definition monitors; air conditioning that works; and, most importantly, amazing chairs – the kind of back and neck support a journalist could only dream of. But it's important for games programmers to be able to relax at work. Producing a videogame has become a multi-million-pound business and any studio worth its salt must take care of its staff. Deep Red knows this. Based in the sticks outside Milton Keynes, the small studio has an almost bucolic feel to it, summed up by its delightfully unkempt and overgrown garden – complete with a fish-filled pond centrepiece. It just looks like a nice place to be.

This 'nice place' has also produced some big hitters (at least, in its chosen area) in its relatively short time in existence. "Deep Red was incorporated in 1998, so we're eight years old now," explains director Clive Robert. "The first









"IF YOU ARE GOING TO BE THE BEST DEVELOPER IN THE WORLD YOU HAVE TO BE PASSIONATE WITH WHAT YOU DESIGN"
CLIVE ROBERT, DIRECTOR

game we worked on was *Risk II,* an expansion of the board game. We did *Monopoly Tycoon*, which sold ridiculously well. Then it was *Beach Life* for Eidos, one of our more critically acclaimed games…". There's no denying that a large portion of console gamers won't have even heard of most of Deep Red's previous games, but that's irrelevant, because it has always catered for one particular market. In an increasingly competitive industry, the firm sees its specialisation as both a blessing and a curse. "I think the way the games industry has gone in the last four or five years, it's not possible to be the master of none rather than the jack of all trades," says Robert. Clearly Deep Red has its sights set on social simulation mastery. "If you are going to be the best developer in the world, you have to be passionate with what you design," Robert asserts. "The only downside to that is that it makes it very difficult to be diverse. The first question a publisher will ask when you're pitching a game is 'have you done this before?'." In a way, the videogame industry is beginning to mirror Hollywood, in that any element of risk is rubbed out to ensure a guaranteed return on investment. However, when a company is producing games at the top end of the genre, then the no-risk method is by no means a bad thing.

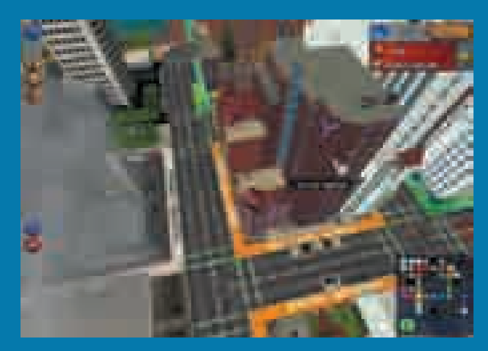
Deep Red's new game, *Tycoon City: New York,* looks like a good no-risk title. It's aiming to blend *The Sims* with a full-blown city-building game, and at this stage it's looking like it might just have succeeded; and a combination of such popular elements surely guarantees success. If Deep Red wants to compete with a heavyweight like EA's *Sims* then it can't afford to release anything less than superb, and such an ambitious project requires people that are at the peak of their game. Studio director Chris Dillon explains the selection process for a successful team. "I think that when creating a team, you need different types of people," he begins. "You can have your specialists – people who know the genre inside out – but it's also nice to bring in fresh people, people

RED OR DEAD

Deep Red has been building cities long before *New York* came along…

MONOPOLY TYCOON [PC, 2001]

Deep Red's first hit was the wildly successful *Monopoly Tycoon.* Building upon the foundations of the board game, the videogame asks the player to actually become involved in the development of the properties as well as the traditional game itself.



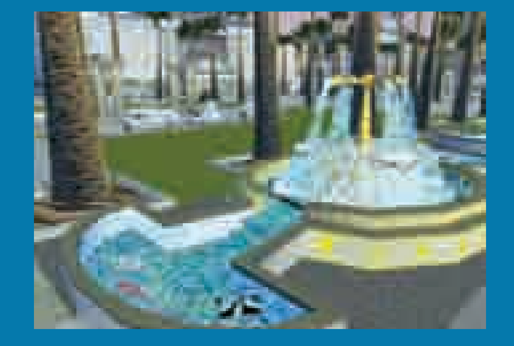
BEACH LIFE [PC, 2002]

A hit with the critics but not the buying public, *Beach Life* puts the player in charge of their own beach resort. Playing like a laid-back *Theme Park,* the game has a very relaxing feel and is an excellent excuse for not going outside during hot summer days. Well, summer days.



VEGAS TYCOON [PC, 2003]

The clue's really in the title, people. Start small and build up your Vegas casino empire. Demonstrating the depth that is synonymous with Deep Red Games' software, *Vegas Tycoon* is another success story for the developer. These boys sure do know their market.





Deep Red was founded in 1998 but has seen real growth since the turn of the millennium. Must be that fresh Milton Keynes air…

Expect to see a lot of these. Building things is what Deep Red's games are all about.

LOOKING FORWARD

Deep Red is not content with just dominating the PC market with its own brand of social simulation games. No, Clive Robert and co are looking to expand. "I think that any platform where we can make our games work, we are interested in," Robert says. "Traditionally, social simulation games haven't worked terribly well on home consoles, but I think that's changing. We need to devise an interface that will make our games work as well on a console as the PC." Nothing concrete has been decided yet, but we wouldn't be surprised if Xbox 360 adopters will one day be managing their own versions of New York City.

BUILDING BRIDGES

World-building games have evolved in the last few years, and in *Tycoon City: New York* it's just as important to keep track of the city's socio-cultural happenings as is it to create the buildings themselves. Don't worry – there's still more than enough skyscraper construction to go around.

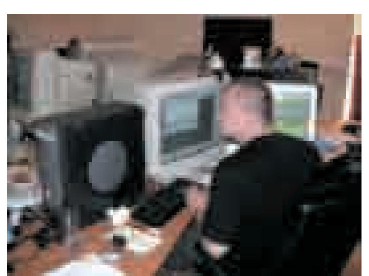
who you train up. I often think the best people are the people who you nurture through their career. If someone comes in cold, then they can't have an intimate working knowledge of the strengths of the company, but if they're nurtured, then they will."

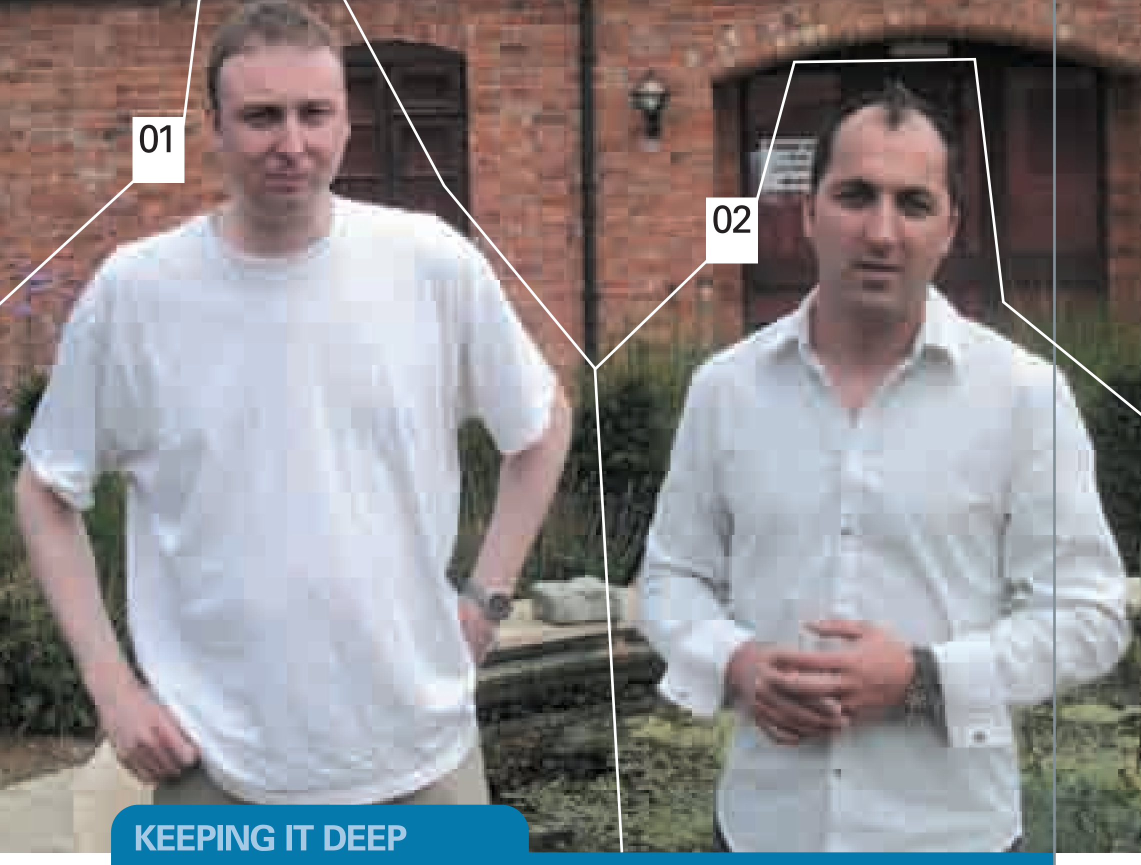
Deep Red has a mould, a 'type' of developer, that it wants working as a part of its team. It's well aware, however, that a successful studio must now look outside the traditional videogame boundaries when selecting staff. As games become more lavish and expensive, the need for experience from a large cross-section of the media world is increasingly crucial. "I think the most successful teams find a balance," Dillon says. "I think, classically, people come from a games background. Things are changing, though. People are coming from more varied backgrounds – people are coming in from a film background, a music, or a writing background. The industry is changing." We're inclined to agree. "Project management has become much more crucial – much larger," Dillon adds. It's indicative of an industry that is now incredibly competitive that companies can no longer rest on their laurels when it comes to management, especially if they're determined to remain independent.

Independence is a diminishing commodity in the world of games development these days. Deep Red is one of around 16 independent studios left in the UK. It must be hard for a firm to continue the struggle when it sees a company like Criterion being snapped up by the might of EA, thus removing that firm's risk and money



Imagine if the real New York had been built by a couple of guys with high-end PCs. Hey, maybe it was…





KEEPING IT DEEP

1 CLIVE ROBERT
DIRECTOR
IN A NUTSHELL: A veteran of the industry, Robert cut his teeth developing at Hasbro before forming Deep Red. Has been with the company throughout its eight-year history. Operates with a laid-back style, which is reflected throughout the workplace.

2 CHRIS DILLON
STUDIO DIRECTOR
IN A NUTSHELL: Has been working with videogames since he was 14, coding Spectrum games in his bedroom. Has worked at Eidos, Pure Entertainment and Midway. Has only been with Deep Red for 18 months, but his experience is invaluable to the team.

"THE FIRST QUESTION A PUBLISHER WILL ASK WHEN YOU'RE PITCHING A GAME IS 'HAVE YOU DONE THIS BEFORE?'"
CLIVE ROBERT, DIRECTOR

troubles, allowing it to work in a relatively stress-free environment. However, Deep Red will not give in that easily. "I think it's getting harder and harder to remain independent," says Robert. "We want to stay that way for as long as we possibly can. There's something to be said for being allied with or bought out by a publishing firm, but it's our desire to remain independent and creatively independent for as long as we possibly can." There's almost an air of inevitability about a takeover, but Deep Red is not the sort of firm to give in without a fight. The staff have strong beliefs about the games their studio should be creating, and it's easy to see they believe that the games are every bit as important as the balance sheet.

With two big-budget games in production – *Rome: Heart Of Empires* joins *Tycoon City* on the release list – you'd be excused for thinking the company is feeling the pressure, particularly given its independent status. But it's not. Dillon, when asked about his proudest achievement at the firm, says, "just working here". It seems the studio has fostered an almost homely atmosphere. Dillon admits, "Unfortunately, there aren't many companies around any more like Deep Red. The industry has become very cold, and lots of people are moving from this industry to different areas due to the volatile nature of our industry. Here, being part of a rich heritage is nice for me." And you know things are good when Clive Robert says his proudest moment is "just being part of a brilliant team for the last eight years".

The pond in the middle of Deep Red Games' garden now has to be covered with a wire mesh. There's a large heron in the area, and he likes nothing more than swooping down of an afternoon and taking his pick of the fish innocently swimming around. No more, though – the safety net sees to that. Somehow, that little story seems fitting – constantly protecting the little fish from being swallowed up by the big bird. Independence isn't easy.

DEEP DEEP DOWN

Deep Red is an unusual name for a development studio, particularly in this instance as it doesn't immediately conjure up images of games featuring towering skyscrapers and profit management. So we felt compelled to ask 'why?'. "It was a drunken thing," explains Robert. "We were sat in a restaurant in London, trying to think of a name for this company we were creating. At first we came up with the name Dark Red and we asked the waitress what she thought of it. She said it reminded her of blood and the occult. That was no good. She was quite a cute waitress, so, being the creative minds that we are, we came up with Deep Red. We ran that by her, and she said it made her think of velvet and sex!"



"IT'S ALL ABOUT INNOVATION AND HOW YOU THINK THROUGH YOUR GAMES. OVER THE NEXT YEAR YOU'LL SEE THE DIRECTION THAT SEGA IS GOING IN"

YUJI NAKA



The Players

HE'S ONE OF THE BIGGEST NAMES IN DEVELOPMENT AND RESPONSIBLE FOR ONE OF THE MOST ICONIC VIDEOGAME CHARACTERS EVER. GAMES™ CATCHES UP WITH YUJI NAKA TO FIND OUT WHAT HE'S GOT UP HIS SLEEVE…

YUJI NAKA

SEGA

Of all the people that you get to speak to in this industry, there are only a few that are going to make you feel truly nervous. There are some individuals that are far greater than we could ever dream of being and one of these is Yuji Naka. Unsurprisingly, he doesn't seem too rattled about the fact that he's talking with us. Quite the opposite, in fact. Despite it being close to the end of a day that's been full of journalists like us, and the fact that he's just returned from a signing where he's scrawled his name on his nth copy of *Sonic* something, he's calm and confident.

"I started at Sega very early on," he begins. "I went straight from high school 22 years ago and became a programmer. Eventually I started work on *Sonic* and things became much bigger"

Ah, Sonic, the character that made Naka a legend. It's tempting to ask his favourite of the 30-plus titles that have featured the speedy little hedgehog, but we're fairly sure he's going to say the first one. We ask anyway, and he doesn't disappoint. "Of course it's the first one," he smiles. "That was my first and will always remain my favourite." However, this answer only serves to fuel a notion that we – as well as a number of other videogame fans, no doubt – have been contemplating since we saw the first screens of his new title, *Shadow The Hedgehog*. The series has drifted – massively so. You can brush aside various pinball and racing escapades easily enough, but we're now looking at a well-known *Sonic* character toting guns – a far cry from the series' roots of which Naka is so obviously fond. "*Shadow* is definitely the game it was intended to be," he insists. "It's meant to be a completely separate title from the *Sonic* games. If you look at the action game genre, you'll notice it's very evolved. There are now fully 3D worlds, you can pick up any weapon and ride in any vehicle. The idea is to broaden the *Sonic* gameplay and to meet the wants of the audience."

To be fair, the evolution of the series has looked to be heading this way for some time. Ever since Sonic ventured into 3D, the games have been becoming far broader, but if you're going to head down this route anyway, why not give Sonic the limelight – surely his recognisable snout would shift far more copies than Shadow? "That's true," Naka agrees. "But it's Sonic. I didn't want to have Sonic with a gun, so I made it with Shadow. I would never give Sonic guns – Sonic shouldn't have weapons, as it doesn't fit his character, but I've recently been getting a lot of requests from the kids where they say 'hey, I want to play a Sonic game where I can shoot guns and things', so I decided to let Shadow do it."

Although Naka has plenty on his plate for now, there are even more interesting times ahead for Sega. A merger with Sammy has meant that the company's presence in the arcades is on the rise and this year's E3 provided an interesting next-gen *Sonic* demo that was 'just for show' according to Naka. But what does Sega have in store for us when the next-generation machines do arrive? "Looking to the future, it's definitely beyond just improved graphics," Naka tells us. "It's all about innovation and how you think through your games. Over the next year you'll see the direction that Sega is going in, but it's all about innovation versus how real the games end up looking. That's what developers are caring about – they like developing for the DS because of the new options available."

These are mysterious words and the look on Naka's face certainly hints that no amount of prompting will make him give away his plans. But with Naka being so keen on giving the public want they want, we decided to see if he'd do us a favour. One of our favourite Sega games, *NiGHTS Into Dreams*, is long due a sequel; can Naka help us out? "Ha! I would like to see a new *NiGHTS* game," he admits. "But that was ten years ago now and I have a lot of other projects to be getting on with. I certainly have more ideas that I didn't get into the last game, so maybe in the future." Here's hoping…

Shadow The Hedgehog is due for release on 25 November and will appear on PlayStation2, Xbox and GameCube.

REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Scoring's a messy business when it comes to videogames, so we keep things as simple as possible here at games™. Marking out of a possible ten, a game that is decidedly average will score five – that doesn't mean it's necessarily bad, just that it doesn't do anything particularly special against its peers. We also refuse to bow to PR pressure, meaning scores are our genuine opinion: we sing the praises of the great games and give the lesser ones the scorn they deserve. You might not always agree with us, but we're just trying to help – after all, everyone has an opinion, right?



First-person shooters aren't scary, right? Wrong. *F.E.A.R.* drops you into a world of psychological terror and wants you to blast your way out…

F.E.A.R 92

BURNOUT REVENGE

"NOBODY GONNA TAKE MY CAR, I'M GONNA RACE IT TO THE GROUND"

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
UK

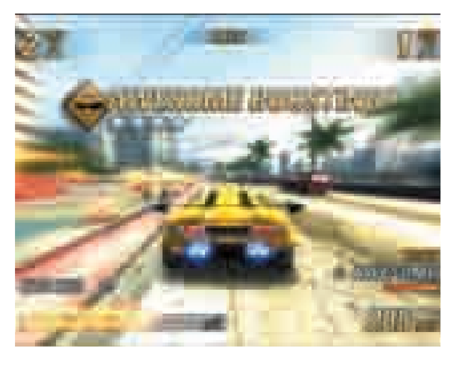
PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

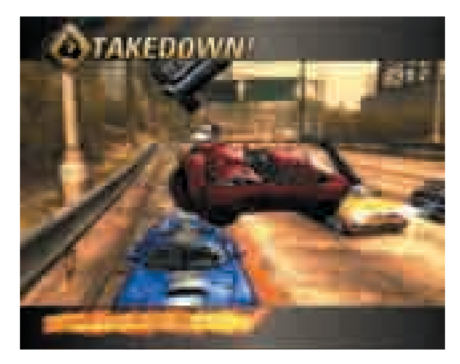
DEVELOPER
Criterion

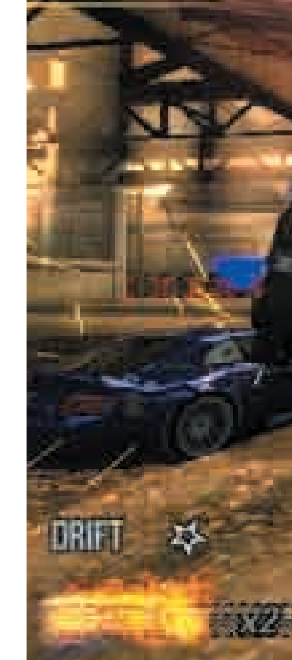
PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2 (2-6 Online)







It's pretty safe to say that the full potential of this console generation will never be realised. As we look toward the next 12 months, sure, we see a lot of pretty games out there but they don't prevent us from wondering just what those consoles currently under our TVs can really do. Of all the firms that must have some idea, surely it's RenderWare king Criterion that has come closest to delivering a next-gen experience a whole generation early. Faster, shinier and more intense than *Burnout 3*, *Revenge* is a truly wonderful salute to the PlayStation2, the Xbox and even the poor old GameCube (forgotten after *Burnout 2*) on the eve of the next generation. Blinking is a luxury once again and it's not just that you won't be able to – you simply won't want to.

First things first – if you thought *Burnout 3: Takedown* was too much of a diversion from the first two games in the series, you may as well stop reading now and keep that £40 in your pocket. *Revenge* continues down the same *Road Rash*-esque route of racing/combat fusion, this time moving even further toward the latter. The vengeance theme of the title runs through the entire game, making it important to make rivals who overstep the mark pay if you want your rating to rise to that hallowed Elite rank.

The game's main new feature is the ability to 'check' traffic, something that works far better than it rightly should. While you can rip a path down the right side of the road rather than dodging traffic, the resultant speed loss and vision impairment makes staying in front and not wrapping your wheels around the back of a bus quite a challenge; it's just another way to earn boosts in those quieter parts of the courses – ducking between oncoming vehicles is as effective as ever and this addition just makes Burning Laps that much more possible. Then there's the new mode centred around this feature: Traffic Attack is a simple demolition run, rewarding the player for smashing as many cars as possible in the given time limit. Perfect after a stressful day at the office.

A major complaint about the last game concerned the cheating rubber band AI but Criterion has levelled the playing field in several respects. General catch-up isn't quite as bad as in

Look out below. The new Vertical Takedown is a high-flying addition.



CRASH, MONEY AND FAME

Among the key improvements to the game is the total reworking of Crash mode. Gone are the multipliers and power-ups that shepherded you onto certain routes, gone is the minimal amount of time to mess up the road and gone too is a lot of the control. Crash mode now has a golf-swing-style start – two button taps determine your acceleration and you'll have no control over your car other than steering it toward the imminent carnage. Junctions are far more elaborate this time, requiring a combination of checking skills, jumping accuracy and clever use of the Crashbreaker for maximum damage. Multiple explosions are rewarded with a greater multiplier and taking down a designated Target Car grants a hefty cash bonus. Good luck trying to ruin every car in the junction…

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY CARS?
A decent 77, although the more interesting ones are reserved for the later stages.

Q. HOW'S THE SOUNDTRACK?
The same kind of blend of punk/emo that *Takedown* had – Funeral For A Friend, Pennywise, Thrice…

Q. WHAT ABOUT STRYKER?
Don't worry – that cretin on the radio has been done away with once and for all. We hope.



Takedown and there are a couple of things you can do that your rivals can't to tip the balance in your favour. For one, Traffic Check Takedowns are your exclusive domain, allowing you to blitz through same-direction vehicles and often lose pursuers in the resultant wreckage, or punt hapless drivers up the exhaust of the guy in front. Secondly, the Crashbreaker from Crash mode is dropped into races at about the halfway point of the game, allowing you to risk your boost bar post-pile-up for some explosive payback as the other racers attempt to sneak by. Land either one of these and satisfaction is guaranteed. Well, for you, at any rate – the ex-rival now melted to the wall probably has other ideas.

By far the biggest step up lies in the course design, offering dozens of alternative routes and short-cuts on each map and making far more use of vertical travel than *Burnout* ever did. Jumps, hills and drops feature in the majority of the tracks, bringing into play a new way of dealing with opponents – the Vertical Takedown. Usually more down to luck than judgment, this is death from above in racing game form and crushing an opponent is a wonderfully warming experience, especially when you've taken to the sky with the sole intention of ruining someone's day. Takedowns in general seem to come slightly more easily than in *Burnout 3*, partly due to the fact that opponents are that much more intent on punishing you and their aggression isn't too hard to use against them.

But compared to how the series has evolved between each edition, the gap between *Takedown* and *Revenge* is easily the slimmest to date. This is no bad thing – regular readers will know of our love for *Burnout 3* – and this really is the logical progression for the series. There'll always be those who will whinge, bleat and moan that Criterion is moving further and further away from what *Burnout* 'should' be but the answer to this is simple: just as *Revenge* doesn't render *Takedown* obsolete, the first two *Burnouts* are just as playable today as they always were. Pursuit mode, for example, is still an absolute beauty (resurrected for the PSP version, as it happens), Airport Terminal 3 Reverse just as adrenaline-heavy as it ever was, and as long as you don't go expecting any leniency from the original game, you should be just fine.

Meanwhile back in 2005, EA has brought us one of the most technically impressive games this generation and yet another sublime slice of action-orientated racing. Absolutely glorious.



Hold on to your hats because the speed in *Burnout Revenge* is now more intense than ever.

Using Traffic Attack to rip up the roads really is 'awesome', leaving you to just sit back and watch as other racers eat dirt.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

MIRROR, SIGNAL...: Dodge traffic as usual or simply plough through like a maniac.

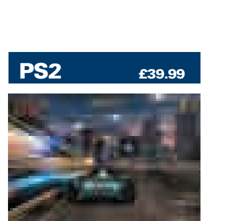
PUNISH: New Takedowns make for even more vehicular carnage. Nice.



VERDICT 9/10

ANOTHER ESSENTIAL TITLE FROM CRITERION

PS2 £39.99



How? No really, how the hell has Criterion managed to squeeze so much out of the ageing Sony hardware? As this is dangerously close to the Xbox version, it'll be the online services and controller preference that determine your version of choice. Oh, and those custom soundtracks…

REAL CAR CRASHES

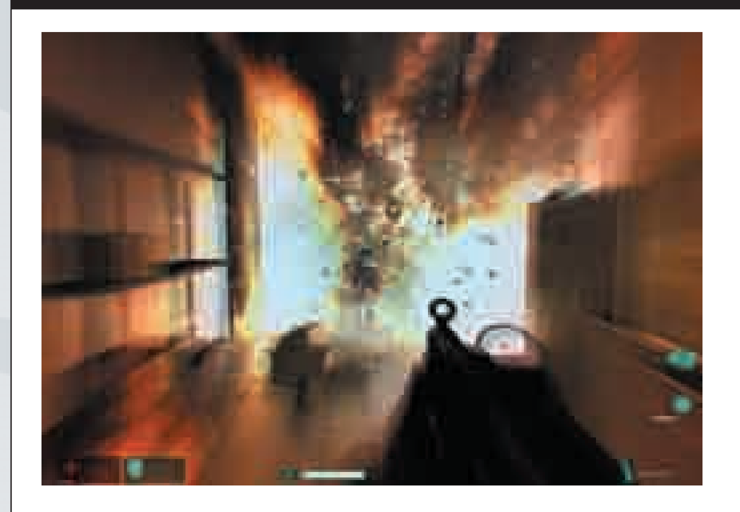


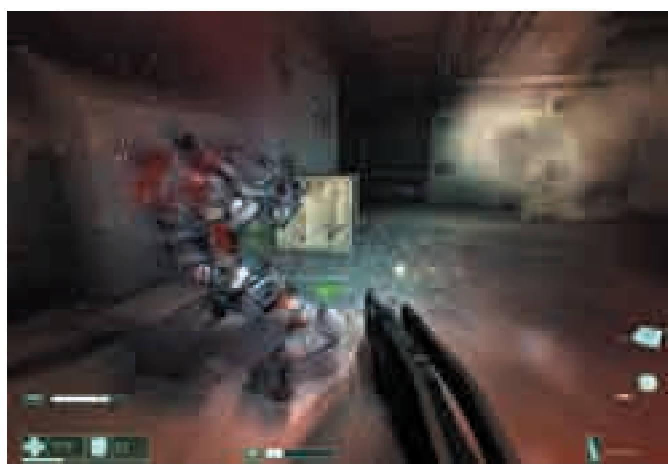
BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE



BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN





IT'S CERTAINLY GOT A BIT OF A RING TO IT

F.E.A.R.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Vivendi Universal

DEVELOPER
Monolith

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium III or Athlon 800 MHz processor, 128Mb of RAM (256Mb for Windows XP), 800Mb HDD space

Why do we do it to ourselves? The scarier the game, the more we want to play it. There must be something wrong with us. When it was mentioned that Capcom would be supplying a helpline number along with copies of *Resident Evil Zero* we couldn't get down to the shops fast enough to witness this terror for ourselves. Unsurprisingly, we were disappointed. Not with the game, of course, but with the ferocity of the scares. They were quite, well, tame, to be frank. This is always the case though; even the *Project Zero* games, despite being labelled as the most frightening titles ever, failed to rattle gamers in the way that was hoped. And these unscary scares are something we're getting used to.

Clearly, it's very difficult to make a game genuinely frightening, and it takes a very clever team to develop a title that promotes terror on any level. Knowing this, it was with great cynicism that we approached *F.E.A.R.*, a game that was not only attempting to prey on our nerves, but in FPS form. Impossible, surely? Also, the clichéd image of a young girl with straggly, face-covering hair that was flaunted in the publicity really forced you to think that someone somewhere was trying a little too hard to squeeze onto a bandwagon. Monolith was going to have to pull something pretty special out of the hat if it wanted to impress. Imagine our surprise, then, when after about 20 minutes of playing, we were enthralled. Good job, Monolith.

The beauty of the title lies predominantly in the atmosphere that's created. An FPS isn't really the ideal setting for psychological torment, but somehow this game manages to feature it anyway. Taking control of a fresh-faced F.E.A.R. recruit (First Encounter Assault Recon, to you), it's down to you and your team to take out some madman who's using telepathic abilities to control an army and cause all sorts of trouble. Predictably, your team is pulled apart in a particularly gory manner by the aforementioned ghost girl and you're left to tackle the problem on your lonesome, while a seemingly endless supply of rescue choppers fail to get close enough to be of any help.

We'll admit that *F.E.A.R.* works so much better than we expected. Play is divided into your traditional 'kill lots of people' areas and nasty mood-setting pieces, and both are done excellently, but the selling point is the latter as it's here that the game really comes into its own. Shadows flicker, children giggle in a hideous way and you're drip-fed the plot through short bursts of startling flashback – most of which involve copious amounts of blood, which, for possibly the first time ever, seems to be necessary and manages not to cheapen the look or feel. Actually, even the clichéd spooky girl is presented well enough to separate her from any counterparts, and it's really only once



With a shirt like that he was asking for it, really. And the slacks, come to think of it.

FAQs

Q. IS IT ACTUALLY SCARY?
Yup, lots of atmosphere, blood and death.

Q. BUT STILL PLENTY OF SHOOTING, YES?
Hell yeah. Lots of atmosphere, blood, death *and* shooting.

Q. HOW DOES THE GAME END?
In your dreams… Do it yourself – we're not going to spoil it for you.



Squeamish types shouldn't have looked at this pic before reading the caption.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

SPOOKY STUFF: We haven't been this unnerved by a game in a long while.

HOW SLOW CAN YOU GO?: Bullet time done well? Surely not.

I AIN'T AFRAID OF NO GHOST

What's an FPS without weapons? Nothing, that's what. Despite being a ghostly game, there are no paranormal vacuum cleaners here and you should look forward to some good old-fashioned weaponry. Unfortunately, these tools are pretty worthless when it boils down to gittish phantom girls who can kill you with the merest touch, but you'd be surprised how well a nail gun works on regular flesh and blood. In fact, it works well whether the flesh is living or not. What's more, you can make those bodies dance for as long as you want thanks to the game's great physics engine.

the credits are rolling that you realise – for the first time since the game started, at least – that you've just been toyed with by a character that's seen quite a bit of mileage.

It sounds great, we know, but there are a few low points. As the game draws to a close the missions deteriorate into nothing more than simple fetch quests, which is annoying considering the standard of the stages throughout the rest of the game, and as these are placed directly before the frankly awesome final couple of levels they feel as if they're keeping you from the climactic ending for the sake of it. Also, the freshness of the fear fades as you pass through the game. At the start you find yourself peering into every darkened corridor and sucking up as much of the atmosphere as you can, but the later levels often see you realising that if spooky things are afoot then there's a fair chance you can run on to the next firefight without facing too much danger. Thinking about it, these are the nicest complaints in the world (and if it weren't for our eagerness to find out how the story turns out we probably wouldn't have cared as much) but, as it stands, the game's quality makes these few tiny flaws stand out.

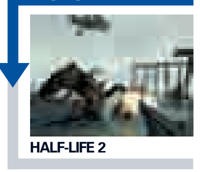
When it comes down to it, if you own a PC that's going to be able to run *F.E.A.R.* at the graphical and audio level that it deserves, then you'd be a fool not to make a purchase. For a game to strike a good balance between eeriness, traditional FPS action and straight-out frights is astonishing, and *F.E.A.R.* has managed it in style.

DOOM 3



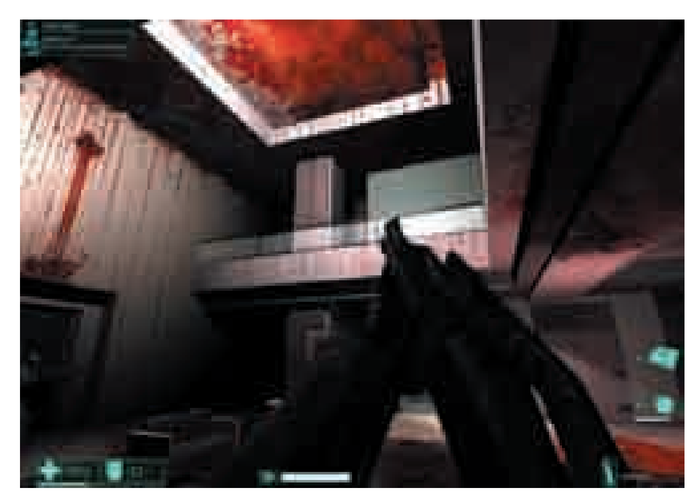
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



HALF-LIFE 2

In terms of effects and atmosphere, *F.E.A.R.* is up there with the best of them.

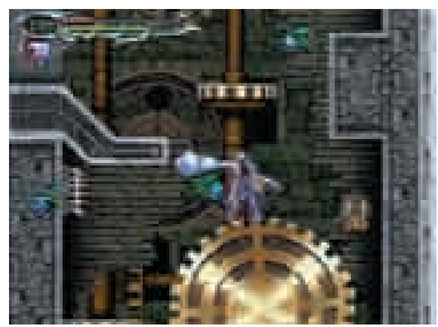






VERDICT 8/10

IF YOU THINK YOU'RE HARD ENOUGH…

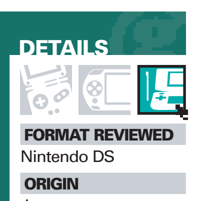


Some of the 'homages' are most amusing – using a remix of the original *Clock Tower* music here is a particularly nice touch.

ONE SCREEN FOR SORROW, TWO FOR JOY…

CASTLEVANIA: DAWN OF SORROW

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

If we ever come face-to-face with Koji Igarashi again (Konami's main man when it comes to *Castlevania*), he might think we're crazy when the subject of *Dawn Of Sorrow* comes up. It's all in the physicality, you see – we'll give him a big hug, a slap on the wrists, a quizzical look and then another hug, all before security drags us away. But whether it means Konami bans us from meeting its developers or not, the actions will be well worth it, if only because they convey our feelings for *Castlevania*'s first DS outing better than words ever could.

Naturally, the hug is for the effort, something every *Castlevania* fan will be grateful for. Ever since *Symphony Of The Night* evolved the series into its current action/RPG hybrid form, a new game has been a big event for its hardcore contingent, so it's only natural that people get excited about the DS playing host to the next iteration. However, it's all the more pleasing that Konami has managed to resist the call of 3D now that the series has moved onto a more advanced handheld. We doubt the same will be said when Konami creates a *Castlevania* game for the PSP, but we couldn't be happier that *Dawn Of Sorrow* upholds the 2D roots of its GBA brethren.

Actually, we could be happier. It's not that we have a problem with *Dawn Of Sorrow* following on from the last game, *Aria Of Sorrow*, because the

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
TOUCH ME: Some of it's extraneous, other parts work well; the touch screen is certainly interesting.
ON THE SPOT: They're minor touches, but the spot effect improvements on sound and visuals add up.



If it's old-school *Castlevania* action you want (complete with classic music), unlock Julius mode for a slice of whip-wielding action.



Weapons handle differently depending on their strengths and characteristics, so it's best to find one that suits your style.

FAQs

Q. THROWN IN AT THE DEEP END?
Definitely. If you've never played *Castlevania*, you won't find any help here.

Q. NEW OR OLD?
The re-use of resources from previous games won't go unnoticed, but there are new touches.

Q. TOO DIFFICULT?
Save points are too far apart, but build up your power and locate warp points, and that changes.



The ironic thing is that we've beaten Death many, many times before… and yet he won't die. The man's a walking contradiction, we tell you.



Soul possession is the key to making progress – some of the attacks you can use are particularly powerful and nasty.

development of characters we're already familiar with – not to mention the continuation of an absorbing storyline – is no bad thing in a series like this. We're even used to the fact that *Castlevania*'s ongoing vampire thread is matched only by the reappearance of familiar enemies and themes, albeit ones tweaked to represent the advancement in the series. Even so, such familiarity shouldn't stretch through to virtually every element of the game unless it's done in an ironic or affectionate way, and while *Dawn Of Sorrow* manages to capture both of these ideals, it's also incredibly lazy in places when it comes to recycling past material.

As such, those familiar with earlier GBA incarnations may be appalled at Konami's flagrant re-use of almost every sprite from the last game here, with almost no changes at all. True, some new enemies appear (most notably the bigger, meaner bosses) and a smattering of others have had facelifts through the use of scaling or rotational effects, but for the most part, the similarities smack of a blasé attitude toward the game's creation – something we didn't expect from its developers. A big smack on the wrist for you, Iga; bad boy, dirty boy, in your coffin.

That isn't to say that *Dawn Of Sorrow* doesn't improve on where *Aria* left off. Indeed, the move to the DS has allowed Konami to be creative through the handheld's capabilities. But, ultimately, the use of the DS comes down to a single special power for hero Soma (being able to remove blocks in his way with the stylus, a touch used only a few times in the entire game) and the whole 'finishing bosses off with a magic seal' thing that, while nifty initially, soon doesn't have much of a point (beyond giving you yet



Bosses come in all shapes and sizes, their deaths usually yielding souls that allow you to move on somewhere else in the castle.

another way of messing up the somewhat harsh boss battles, of course).

Does all this sound too negative to warrant the final score? Perhaps. But wrist-slapping and eye-rolling aside, there's a reason for that final big hug: in spite of its faults, *Dawn Of Sorrow* is very enjoyable. Finding every nook and cranny of the castle is, as always, an expansive task, as is collecting every soul and completing all of the multiple endings. Dead ends soon become new possibilities as Soma's skills increase, repeatedly slaughtering enemies advances your strength, and the continual need to manage your equipment – both in terms of weapons, clothing and souls – requires plenty of attention… just like all the great *Castlevania* games. And that's exactly what *Dawn Of Sorrow* is; it may have flaws that could have been avoided given a bit of effort, but there's no denying the vampiric charms of the game.

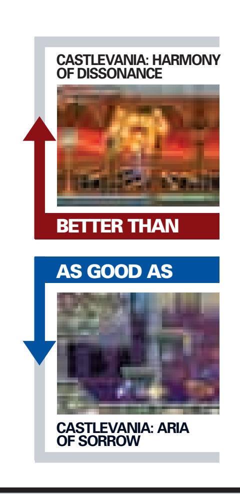


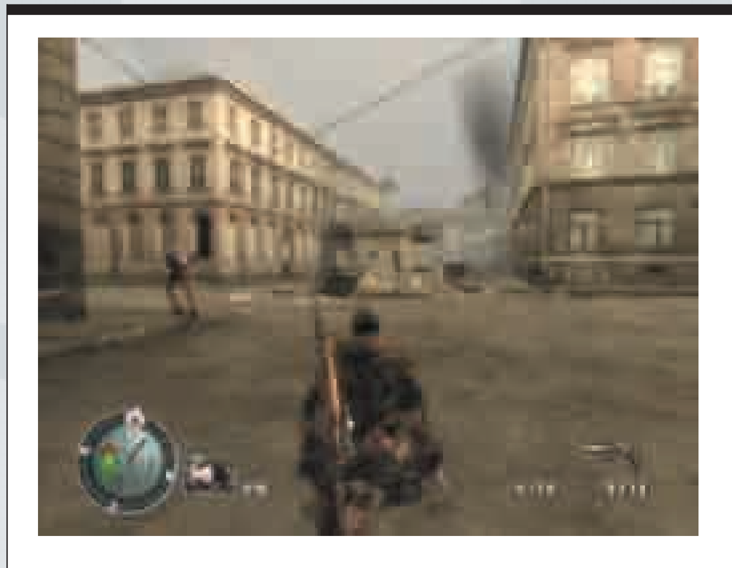
VERDICT 8/10

A GREAT GAME, DESPITE THE GIMMICKS AND DÉJÀ VU

YOU KNOW YOU GOT SOUL

Soma's power of dominance – or 'the ability to collect the souls of monsters you kill', as it was known in *Aria Of Sorrow* – makes a comeback here. As before, soul collection has a typically Pokémon 'gotta catch 'em all' air, and the souls you have determine the sub-powers you can use. However, weapon enhancement is also now directly linked to soul ownership; although you'll still find weapons lying around the place, fusing key souls with particular weapons allows you to increase your power exponentially. Of course, doing so costs you that soul, so you'll need several of each in order to complete your collection and get the best weapons.







DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Rebellion

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

SNIPER ELITE

SATISFACTION IS A HEADSHOT FROM 144 METRES WITH A NORTH-EASTERLY CROSSWIND

We're not nice people. We've considered this fact whenever a tramp's request for change has been ignored or a cigarette has been extinguished in a kid's ice cream. It's not that we want to be bad; it's just that the rewards seem so much sweeter. Our past in the real world, however, is prologue for the things we've done in this WWII virtual battlefield with a bit of cover, a small amount of patience and a sniper rifle. Things of which we are proud, which is why we still feel so awkward.

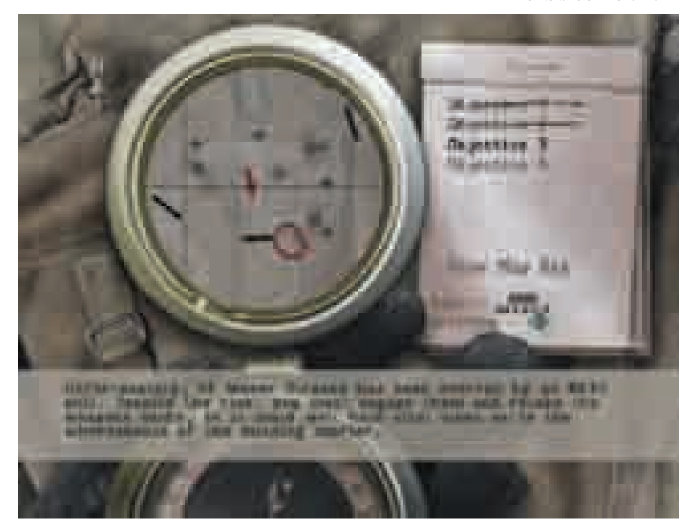
Sniper Elite is, in many ways, a unique take on the now almost fully mined historical shooter. You play a German who shoots Russians… and sometimes Germans too. More accurately, you play an American who dresses as a Wehrmacht soldier so he can negotiate Berlin during the last days of the war. Your mission: to stop the Russians finding Germany's nuclear plans and therefore preventing Stalin from using 'The Bomb' to take over Europe once the peace has been won.

This backstory provides a surprising variety of missions considering the game's title – it's *Sniper Elite* and so your most effective skill is the long-range kill, but that doesn't mean that assassination is your meat and potatoes or that any of the other weapons you can take from the dead are less effective in their operational ranges. Bullets, no matter where they come from, will kill the enemy quickly and often in very inhumane ways. While the game does feature such gaming classics as health packs and bandages for the restoration of health, and you can take a few more hits than the enemy, it is remarkably ruthless in its depiction of war. Sniping is encouraged simply because when you're a single soldier against an army, concealment is your most effective weapon.

LET'S PLAY SNIPER AND SPOTTER

Two-player modes are usually simple amplifications of the single-player experience; *Sniper Elite*'s co-operative mode is much more of an extension since it requires you and your accomplice to work together in a greater way than simply doubling firepower. You'll work as a sniper and spotter team where one is on look-out while the other is ready with the scope. These roles can be constantly swapped so no one player is given a single job to do, but both people interchange roles as and when the situation requires. This makes for some classic high-fiving moments as well as an opportunity to watch a sniper at work from another angle. Excellent.

■ *Sniper Elite* shows that there are still plenty of angles from which to take on World War II.



FINGERPRINT

gamesTM

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

BATTLEFIELD EXECUTION: It's all about being sneaky, using cover and owning the battlefield.

TACTICAL WOUNDING: Wound an enemy, make him call out for a comrade to help. Kill them both.

FAQs

Q. IS IT LIMITED TO HIDING AND SHOOTING?
Not at all. Many tactics can be employed, including tripwires and TNT, as long as you kill the enemy.

Q. IS THERE LOTS OF WAITING?
Two or three minutes can be spent just waiting for a target to arrive but that gives you time to scout the terrain.

Q. ANY MELEE ATTACKS?
No, it's about guns and a bit about explosives. Three guns can be carried at one time.

Injure one man, then take out his buddy when he comes to help his wounded mate. You're sick, you are…

The enemy die in accordance with the laws of the bullet, but they have two important factors on their side: they know how to aim and shoot, and are genuinely intelligent. In many games, missing a shot with a sniper rifle means your target will carry on regardless and not hear the report, let alone the explosion of masonry on the wall next to him. Miss a shot here and you get an instant reaction as the target notices your position and gives an alert to his comrades who'll try to outflank you. They take cover when threatened, and are ruthless hunters. This makes the sniping more realistic; concealment is paramount, while camping in one spot guarantees that men with guns will find you… and they won't ask to see your papers.

The effect created by balancing realism with more frivolous gaming etiquette is a tension similar to that found in *Rainbow Six 3*, while the realism makes *Hitman: Contracts* seem like a cartoon. There's a genuine sense of danger in every situation, since one slip-up means death. Through Rebellion making the enemy so deadly and the missions so without pity, the focus of the bullet physics and the reward you get from making a perfect shot are all the more enjoyable. A single kill shot will give you an almost pornographic depiction of a bullet in flight as the camera shows off every glinting angle. This is an adult game in the truest sense of the word and so a disturbing amount of detail has been lavished on bullet effects. Heads, for example, have been created out of polygons that go deeper than the skin, so a shot to the mouth can show shattered teeth, while cheekbones can be detonated, ears ruined and brains vaporised. You're



Not every kill shot is rewarded with a bullet-cam view – only the cleanest.

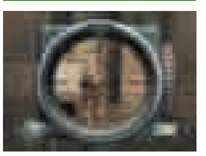
then informed of the distance of the shot and whether the target was moving or not. You can even use wounding as a tactic by making injured men scream for their friends. Kids will have nightmares.

On the easiest difficulty settings, this game is testing to the point where impatient players will consider that a try-and-die mechanic is in place, although smartness will always prevail. On harder modes your stance, health level and any breeze have to be accounted for before making the shot. *Sniper Elite* makes headshots a grizzly reward that becomes addictive and, because the battle is always weighted against you, filled with air-punching satisfaction every time you make a connection. And a twinge of guilt. Bravo.

VERDICT 8/10

WWII ADVENTURING AS CUNNING AS ITS SNIPER CONCEIT

XBOX £34.99



The same game though not without the graphical enhancements you'd expect from a higher-specification machine. It's also no surprise that co-operative Live play works more fluidly than its PS2 cousin. Both versions have the same wondrous sense of being an angel of death, however.

HITMAN 2



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



BATTLEFIELD 2

CREEPY AND KOOKY, MYSTERIOUS AND… WELL, KIND OF DULL TO BE QUITE HONEST



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
N-Space

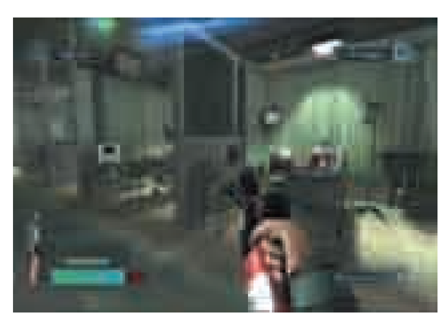
PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
7 October
(US: Out Now)

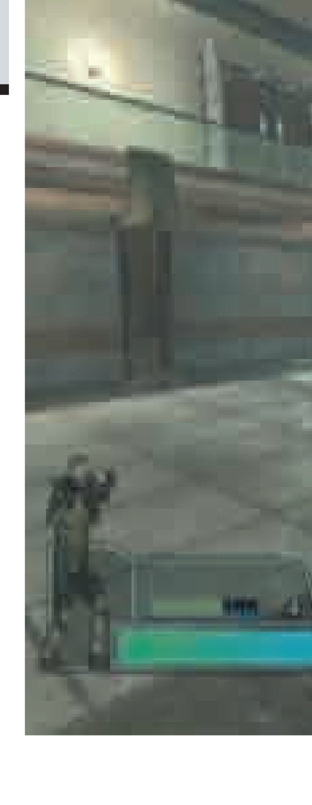
PLAYERS
1-4

***Geist* is a game that might have passed many people by during its development.** It's been hiding in the background for several years, showcased only briefly and inconspicuously and always appearing in the 'TBA' section of Nintendo's release lists. Its premise, however, stirred enough interest to ensure that it was never completely forgotten. Allowing players to step into the ethereal shoes of a disembodied ghost on a mission to regain his material form, the game follows you as you proceed to unravel the mysteries of the organisation that ripped you from your fleshy shell. The game's main talking point is the fact that in order to progress as a spiritual entity, the ghost has to possess everything from drinks cans to rats to terrified people. Interesting? Well, kind of.

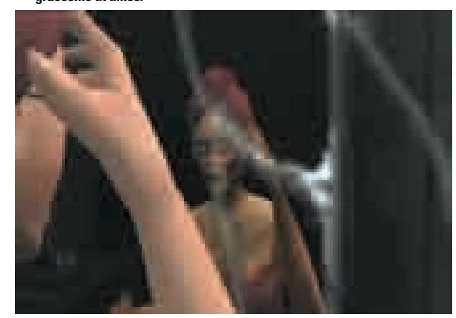
Possessing things at will sounds really, really brilliant (or at least, we certainly thought so). Figuring out what to possess in order to scare people, smashing things up, causing havoc, playing with enemies' sanity by chucking plates at them, locking doors behind people… the possibilities seemed endless. This game could have been a brilliantly innovative and fun experience. Unfortunately, the truth is more disappointing than fiction and while it's clear that *Geist* implements a generous handful of extremely good ideas, it just doesn't do it all that well.



The elements are certainly all there, with an enormous variety of possession-friendly objects lying around in the game and plenty of people to scare. There's an intriguing storyline, a multitude of set-pieces and scenarios, and some interesting ghostly puzzles. The problem is that there's absolutely no freedom in how you might deal with all these elements. *Geist* doesn't so much lead you by the hand as put blinkers on you and poke you in the back with a stick. Possessing people, for instance, can only be done once that person is scared enough. Figuring out how to scare them might have been good fun, but all you actually have to do is find the nearest object, possess it and hey presto. There'll usually be three or four objects in an area that will need to be possessed in a specific order, but it's never much of a challenge to figure out what that order is. Scaring people is never more than a scripted set-piece,so there's no freedom of method whatsoever. At first the novelty is sufficient to postpone the onset of boredom, but after a while you just wish that the game would let you figure it out for yourself.



In fitting with the ghostly theme, *Geist* can get quite gruesome at times.

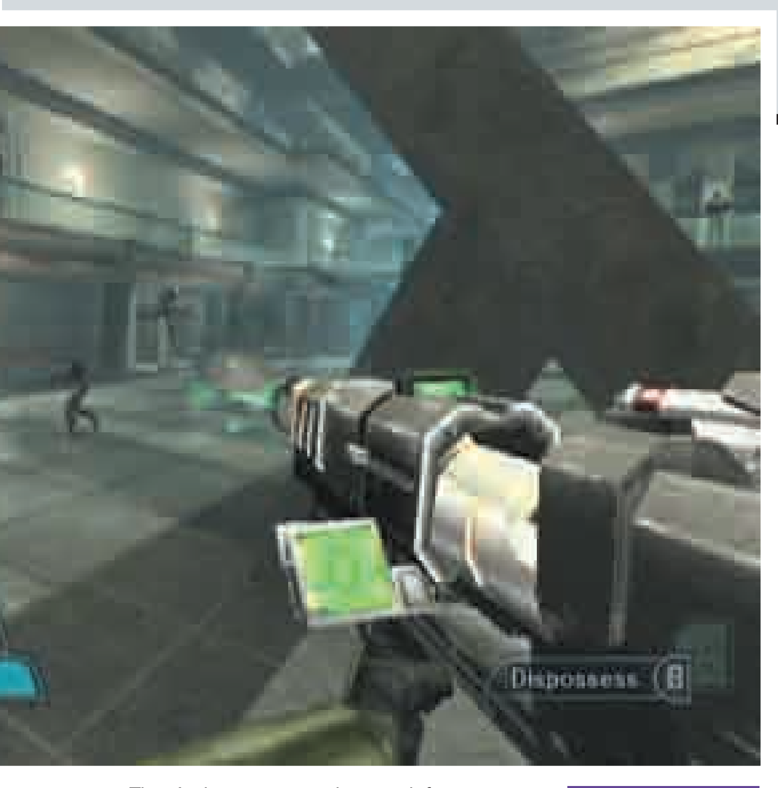


Frightening humans in order to possess them could have been inventive, but instead is disappointingly scripted.





Cleverly, possessing a keypad and making it beep until someone comes to shut it up is the only way to obtain some door codes.





MULTIPOLTERGEISTS

Geist's multiplayer is interesting, despite the fact that it centres on the game's mediocre FPS aspect. Hunt mode, in particular, is reminiscent of _Splinter Cell's_ multiplayer, pitting ghost hunters against ghosts in an inventive and, with four players and a few bots, frantic fight. Ghosts are invisible unless they're moving or the ghost hunter happens to strike lucky with his energy gun, meaning that hunters spend most of the game looking over their shoulders. Ghosts can't damage the hunters, but can possess them for a short time, giving them the opportunity to throw the body into a pit or walk into spikes. It's inventive, but like the rest of the game it leaves you feeling like more could have been done.



There's also never a need to search for a person that you need to possess. If you need someone who can access the locked door in front of you, there will be only one potential host in the vicinity. Not until toward the end of the game, when *Geist* finally starts to accept that you've learned how to play, is there any element of choice with regard to hosts – and it's only near the end that *Geist* becomes engaging for reasons beyond the innate appeal of its essential premise.

For much of the game, you won't actually be a ghost, as at its heart *Geist* is an FPS. Despite the otherworldly twist, you'll be spending much of your time gunning people down by possessing handily placed guards. The FPS aspect of the game is decidedly unremarkable, though not in any way offensive, featuring infinite ammunition, average AI and occasional slowdown during crowded fights. Despite this focus, the game, oddly enough, is definitely not at its best during its big action scenes.

All that said, though, there are several interesting puzzles in *Geist*, along with a few delightfully mysterious scenarios. This title seems to feel far more at home as an adventure game than as an FPS, although it's only very occasionally that it waives gunplay in favour of some leisurely exploration. Upon possessing a host you'll gain a glimpse of their recent memories, which can offer clues as to what to do next. Though most of the game is linear enough to render such clues redundant, occasionally there will be an ingenious (if slightly obvious) solution to a puzzle that will bring a smile to your face.

It's when you stop trying to fight against *Geist's* constraints and start to play it for what it is that you start to experience the best it has to offer. To be fair, there are a few genuinely interesting moments, especially toward the game's conclusion, and it's also not without charm. Unfortunately, charm alone isn't enough to overcome the game's considerable shortfalls in other areas and while repressing the urge to grumble at its unwillingness to acknowledge player intuition or its relentless linearity allows you to see the few shining moments hidden underneath, we still can't help but feel that it's a missed opportunity.

FAQs

Q. POSSESSING STUFF? SOUNDS AWESOME…
It does, but sadly N-Space hasn't quite managed to pull it off.

Q. EVEN WITH NINTENDO'S HELP?
Nope, although it would appear that *Geist* was slightly less of a collaboration than we were led to believe.

Q. STILL FUN, THOUGH?
Certainly, although there's a constant sense that *Geist* just misses out on being something more.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

GHOSTLY GOINGS-ON: The opportunities to possess objects, frighten the crap out of guards and squeeze inside the bodies of rats, dogs and people are what make *Geist* unusual.

VERDICT 4/10

FALLS WELL SHORT OF WHAT IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

TUROK EVOLUTION



BETTER THAN

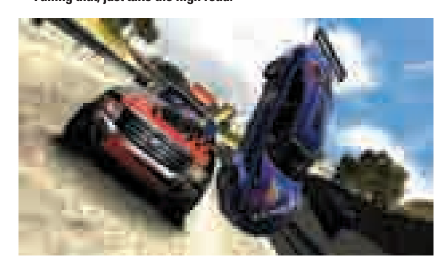
WORSE THAN



TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT



There's a new emphasis on finding the best racing line. Failing that, just take the high road.



The best of the *Burnouts* on a small, but no less incredible, scale. *Legends* suits the PSP down to the ground.



Don't worry about the handheld sacrificing *Burnout's* legendary action – speed is the name of the game, and the name of the game is, er, speed, obviously.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP
ORIGIN
UK
PUBLISHER
EA
DEVELOPER
Criterion
PRICE
£34.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1-2

THANKS, CRITERION – THANKS FOR EVERYTHING

BURNOUT LEGENDS

The sheer magnitude of *Burnout Legends* doesn't sink in straight away. It's testament to Criterion's achievement that a good half an hour's play can go by before it all sets in; the realisation that you're playing a stunning-looking, full-speed, full-impact version of *Burnout* on a tiny handheld console. And you're loving every single second of it. *Legends* is effectively *Burnout's* greatest hits; a best-of compilation of past glories, while the new album *Revenge* (see page 90) moves the series in a different direction. The courses and vehicles are a hand-picked bunch of the best aspects of the game's past, and there are more than enough of them to satiate even the most ardent *Burnout* fans.

Racing is pitched somewhere in between *Burnout 2* and *3*. There's slightly less traffic on the roads than we've become accustomed to, so there's more of an emphasis on finding the best lines round corners and timing that boost to perfection. However, *Takedown's* superb car combat is back in full force, and every bit as visceral and exhilarating as before. It's an astonishing sight when an obliterated car crumples and splinters in real time, with shards of glass and metal spilling over the tarmac. Just how powerful is this little machine?

Of course, *Burnout* is all about speed and, crucially, *Legends* doesn't disappoint. At first, however, it's all a little worrying. To those used to tearing up the tracks in Indy circuit racers with the boost trigger held firmly in place, the initial compact series is upsettingly slow. We were concerned that Criterion had spent so much time and effort ensuring the game looked amazing that the immense speed had been sacrificed. All concerns were quickly banished after unlocking the Coupé (third) series, however. That familiar euphoric sensation of pure, unadulterated velocity starts to creep back, race by race, and by the time the Super series is open it might be time to invest in laser eye surgery, because you're going to need some new retinas.

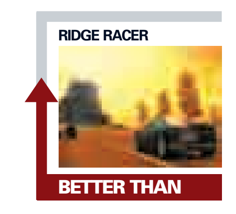
Yes, *Legends* is an absolute masterpiece – the graphics supersede everything else on the PSP, and even the most hectic of accidents cause no slowdown whatsoever. Chuck in a Wi-Fi two-player mode that can be played off just one UMD and you're getting close to the ultimate handheld package. Only the slightest of niggles stop *Burnout Legends* from attaining perfection; very occasionally, opposition cars will pass through traffic, and sometimes crashing seems slightly inconsistent. These problems are so insignificant, though, that it's almost an insult to even mention them – the second generation of PSP software has most definitely arrived.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
LOOK!: It's *Burnout*! In my hand! It's amazing! Oh my god, I'm going to pass out…
JOIN ME: Wi-Fi link-up with just one UMD? Don't mind if we do.



THE PSP'S FINEST ACHIEVEMENT SO FAR – ESSENTIAL

RIDGE RACER



BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE



BURNOUT 3


eMag

"YOU DON'T KNOW SHITE ABOUT SHITE!"

BEAT DOWN: FISTS OF VENGEANCE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

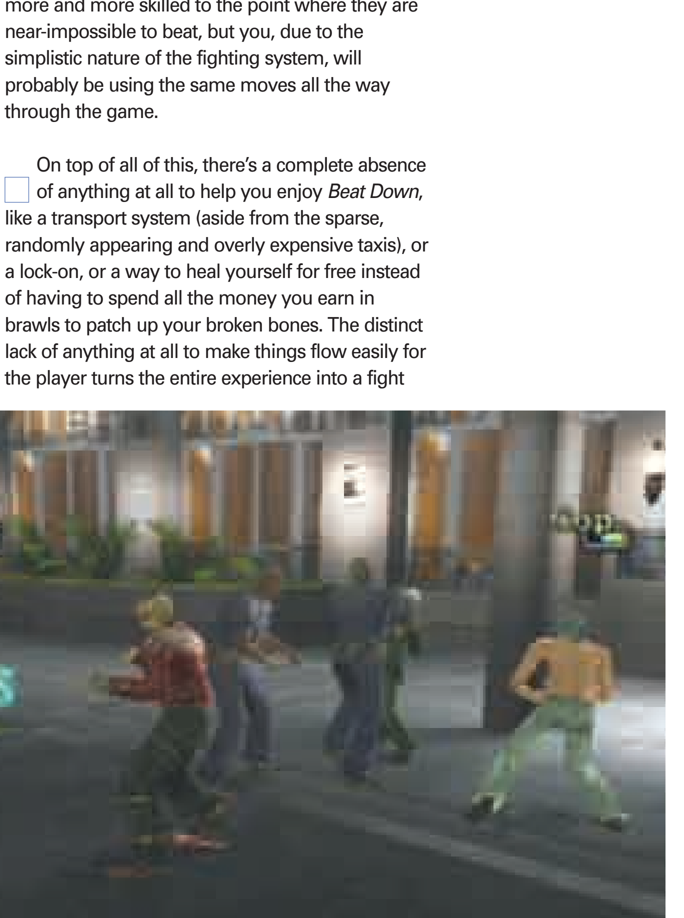
Oh, Capcom, what have you done? Naturally, your recent run of success has left us with the impression that you walk on the metaphorical water of the games industry, but that's not the source of our disappointment. No, it's the fact we can flash back to our childhoods and remember how you revolutionised the scrolling beat-'em-up genre that pains us the most. *Final Fight, Magic Sword, Cadillacs And Dinosaurs*… these were the games that made you great in our eyes, and now you've taken it all away with *Beat Down*, a series of one-on-one and brawl fights interspersed with a few side-missions, a lot of wandering around and not much fun at all.

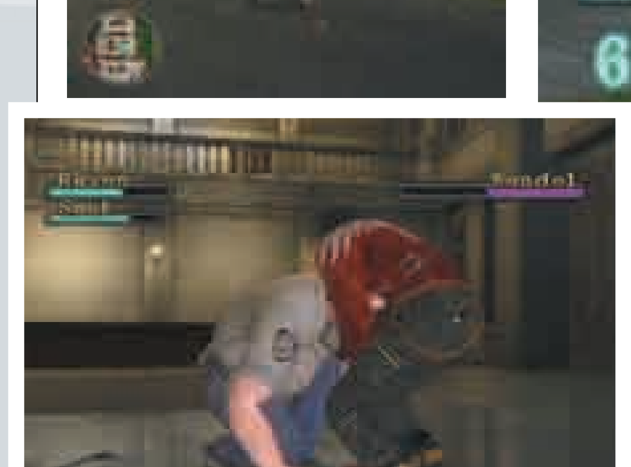
There are many reasons why people might not like *Beat Down*. Some of them are superficial; things like the first lead character's awful voice acting, which wavers between Irish, American and pirate, and the storyline, which is neither involving nor innovative and involves lots of hilariously inappropriate swearing. Oh, and let's not forget the victory soundbite (for there is only one and it plays every single time you win a fight), or the terrible music, which, for the entire game, is on the same four-second loop. Amusing little faults, for a while; they're more irritating than infuriating.

Then there are all the other reasons. The battle system, for instance, is desperately one-dimensional. There are the loops that have you caught up against a wall while your opponent hammers seven bells out of you. There's also the fact that, except for one-time appearances before bosses, there are only two save points in the entire game, and you can't save in the middle of missions. There's the endless wandering from place to place in the absence of any convenient way to get around the map. And the repetitiveness – oh, the repetitiveness. Fight one street-fighter and you've fought them all; your opponents will get more and more skilled to the point where they are near-impossible to beat, but you, due to the simplistic nature of the fighting system, will probably be using the same moves all the way through the game.

On top of all of this, there's a complete absence of anything at all to help you enjoy *Beat Down*, like a transport system (aside from the sparse, randomly appearing and overly expensive taxis), or a lock-on, or a way to heal yourself for free instead of having to spend all the money you earn in brawls to patch up your broken bones. The distinct lack of anything at all to make things flow easily for the player turns the entire experience into a fight

Weapons are available but it's not worth using them, and guns only appear very late in the game.







games™

FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

BEAT 'EM: Half the time, it's a half-hearted 3D beat-'em-up with a desperate lack of move diversity…

STREET 'EM: …and the rest of the time, it's a slow-paced adventure game. It's never fun, though.

HIT ME WITH YOUR RHYTHM STICK

There are a variety of ways to bash people about in *Beat Down*, from your basic punches, kicks and grabs to smacking people over the head with big bits of wood. Weapons lie scattered around during one-on-one and brawl fights, and can be picked up at will, but it's hardly worth it when a few punch-kick combos will finish off your opponent anyway. The second boss you'll face is a woman with a samurai sword, which, ideally, you'd be able to steal from her and then use to finish her off – that is, if the game didn't make it so very difficult for you to get within two metres of her without getting annihilated. Right toward the end of the game, policemen start to carry guns, which they can be forced to hand over – strangely, though, firearms seem to do no more damage than a swift kick in the shins.

against the game to eke even the smallest amount of fun from the proceedings. For the first two hours of play, *Fists Of Vengeance* gave us short, stabbing pains in the temples because of the sheer effort of will that was required to continue playing it.

And then, right at the end, after what you hope is the last annoyingly impossible boss, just when you think the pain might be over, the game throws a stupidly obtuse final chapter at you. Here you must fight hordes of armed opponents and two challenging bosses without being able to save or heal yourself at any point. And if you can bring yourself to complete this sorry title, you're then expected to play exactly the same game all over again with the other four characters. Why the developer imagined that anyone might want to do this remains beyond our comprehension.

In the interests of fairness, there is one likeable thing about *Beat Down*. Your character's appearance is fully customisable, from clothing to tattoos to cosmetic surgery – so you can dress your combatant up in a skirt or suit or whatever else takes your fancy, give him a smart haircut and choose the colour of his sunglasses. Your appearance also affects how likely you are to get recognised by the police or gangs, so playing dress-up isn't simply arbitrary. It's actually a neat feature, which makes it all the sadder that everything else about this game is so awful.

The first two hours of *Fists Of Vengeance* are almost enough to make you want to break the disc into little tiny pieces and insert them into your own eyes. Persevere and it gets slightly more bearable, but not anything like bearable enough to warrant the £40 asking price. True, *Beat Down* isn't entirely without potential, but the execution is woeful. For your own sake, avoid it at all costs.

Customising your character's appearance is actually quite fun… but it's the only thing that is.





Ludicrously foppish fights like this are sadly all too possible here.

FAQs

Q. THAT BAD, EH?
Beat Down is not the worst game we've ever played, but it is one of the most frustrating.

Q. WHY'S THAT?
You get the feeling that in another, better thought-out incarnation, *Beat Down* might have been quite fun.

Q. ARE THE ELEMENTS THERE?
In spirit, yes. It's just that nothing quite fits together properly.



VERDICT 3/10

A LABORIOUS, FRUSTRATING DISAPPOINTMENT, CAPCOM



BEING BEATEN DOWN

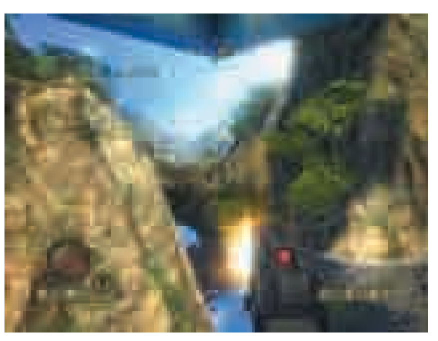
BETTER THAN

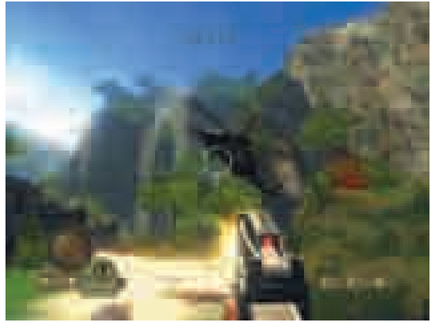


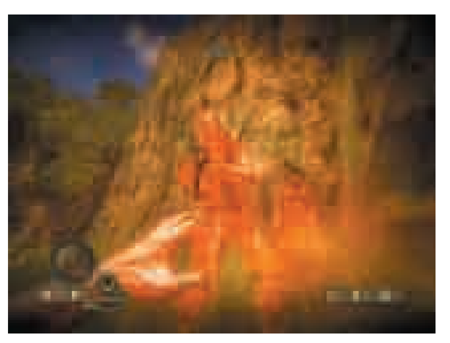
WORSE THAN



DEF JAM: FIGHT FOR NEW YORK


Look, kids, it's like you're in *Doom 3*, flying a glider. No, only joking – that would just be silly, wouldn't it?


Obviously, your firearms are handy but it's your animal abilities that really come in useful as you progress through the jungle.


Your feral senses heighten awareness and let you track enemies by scent trails. A nice touch.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox
ORIGIN
Canada
PUBLISHER
Ubisoft
DEVELOPER
Ubisoft Montreal
PRICE
£39.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1-2 (2-16 Online)

REINVENTING BEAUTY AND THE BEAST…

FAR CRY INSTINCTS

With so many PC developers keen to move into the console playground, the number of computer-to-console ports is hardly surprising. Luckily, though, we have it better today now that developers are far more aware that gamers won't take any more bodged, lazy ports. As console hardware caught up with PCs, the likes of *Soldier Of Fortune* and *Rainbow Six* started cropping up with worrying frequency and an even more worrying lack of quality control. To begin with, we were ready to point the big foam finger at Ubisoft for doing just that with *Far Cry Instincts*…

On the surface, *Instincts* is a real mixed bag. It would be unfair to expect the Xbox to compete with the lush Paradise settings from the PC version, and sure enough the jagged trees don't really create a proper jungle atmosphere. But then you'll reach an interior section and be treated to some of the best visuals the Xbox has to offer – *Doom 3* without the frame-rate issues is a safe comparison. Voice-over work is decent enough; a little heavy on the expletives perhaps but sound in general does its bit just fine.

Ropey trees, lovely water. It's a hard life being as mixed up as *Far Cry Instincts*…



The game itself starts out really quite plodding, the first hour or so flying by with plenty of set pieces, cut-scenes and events that are clearly designed to give the game an explosive opening. But chases and explosions have been done to death already. Sure, it's impressive enough here but the real fun kicks off when Jack's feral abilities begin to awaken and *Instincts* comes into its own.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
ANIMALITY: A freak occurrence gives Carver feral abilities – speed, power, scent tracking and such.
MUTANT MELEE: Low on ammo? Charge in for a melee smash and watch the poor victim soar…

The Feral Attack is a crushing melee dash rather like a *Halo 2* Plasma Sword strike that sends the unfortunate recipient skyward, and even though most of the skills that follow are just animalistic takes on existing elements like night vision, they still manage to feel fresh and original. And you'll keep going back to that oh-so-satisfying brutal melee attack, the icing atop a particularly ruthless killing spree… cake. We meant cake.

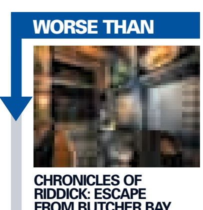
Instincts gets better the more time you invest, and even after the relatively brief single-player stint draws to a close there's plenty more mileage to be had. The multiplayer seems solid enough (although we've yet to really go crazy with the Live elements) and if there's any justice the mapmaker alone will ensure that you'll be breaking out *Far Cry* well into next year. So kudos to Ubisoft for not only recognising the differences between console and PC gaming but developing *Instincts* around them. It's certainly the better game for it.

VERDICT 7/10
A GREAT CONSOLE PARALLEL TO THE PC GEM

BETTER THAN
AREA 51



WORSE THAN



CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY


eMag

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Midway

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

MORTAL KOMBAT: SHAOLIN MONKS

NOW WITH MORE KS THAN EVER BEFORE

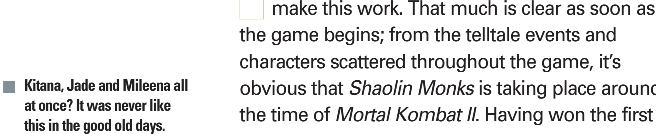
games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

FLASHBACK: No other game has ever brought back so many memories.

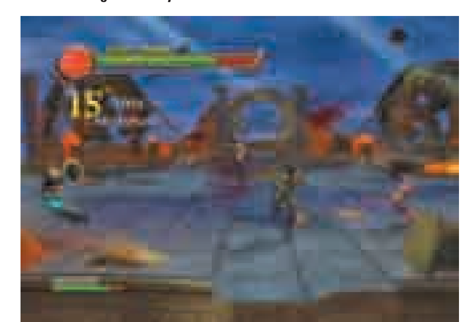
USUAL SUSPECTS: It's great to have so many well-known characters making an appearance.

Why don't people stick to what they know? Surely developers and publishers are aware that taking a game and trying to do something that goes against the grain is going to upset a few people. Putting Bomberman in a car, for example, was a mistake that could never be justified. It's rare that these things come out right, and Midway, after getting its fingers burnt with the utter abomination that was *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero*, should really have learnt its lesson about tinkering with the *Mortal Kombat* format. Because of this, *Shaolin Monks* was met with no small measure of scepticism. Dragging two key *MK* characters – Liu Kang and Kung Lao – out of the fighting genre to partake in a spot of adventuring was going to be risky and, aside from the people out there who'd happily champion anything that has the *MK* logo stamped upon it, many would question the need to move such a well-known franchise in this direction.



As it goes, a real effort has been made to make this work. That much is clear as soon as the game begins; from the telltale events and characters scattered throughout the game, it's obvious that *Shaolin Monks* is taking place around the time of *Mortal Kombat II*. Having won the first ever *Mortal Kombat* tournament, Liu Kang is pretty pleased about things and is hanging out with fellow monk Kung Lao. However, Shang Tsung doesn't like the fact he was beaten in the tournament and attempts to take over the Earth realm, forcing another tournament to take place. So far, so *MKII*. Only this time, it doesn't happen quite like that. Rather than the tournament that many of us fought through in 1994, Kung Lao and Liu Kang will have to battle through an actual story. Countless re-spawning enemies attack in every area as you fight your way through to a well-known boss character, whose death will supposedly weaken Shang Tsung so you can take him down with more ease when you finally reach him. Sure, some of the relationships between characters are explained and you'll occasionally find yourself muttering 'oh, so that's why…' but that's pretty much it – it's all about the fighting.

It's quite impressive how true *Shaolin Monks* stays to the *MKII* formula. All the special moves have been implemented well and there are some fairly impressive numbers to notch up



Kitana, Jade and Mileena all at once? It was never like this in the good old days.





A 144-hit combo is pretty good in a boss fight. Admit it, you're impressed.



Even the Test Your Might element has managed to sneak into the game. Hurrah for button mashing.

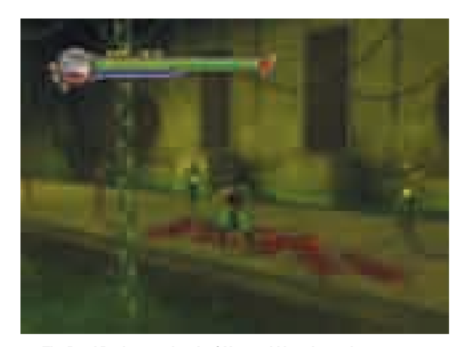
should you start to dabble with combos. The problem is you probably won't; both characters are blessed/cursed with some stupidly cheap moves and at least one simple hard-hitting combo that, unless you really force yourself, there's no real need to move away from. When you add to this the fact that the wealth of Fatalities eventually become nothing more than a way to drag out a fight for an extra ten seconds, you soon find that you've stumbled across something that's pretty average when it comes to actual combat.

This lacklustre gameplay is a shame, as the amount of effort that's been put in to make sure that the misty-eyed *Mortal Kombat* fan feels at home is commendable. All the stages that featured in *Mortal Kombat II* can be found along your journey and the number of little touches that have been included is incredible; the first time you hear a 'Toasty' you'll immediately feel a pang of nostalgia, and the fact that the bodies of those knocked into the Dead Pool will occasionally blurt out their trademark 'uh-wa' is sheer genius.

All these things make you want to play *MKII* all over again – which is handy, as the game is hidden on the disc and is unlockable in all its bloodthirsty glory. In fact, this is just the best of a whole range of secret goodies. Wading through the heaps of artwork and concept art may take a while, but if you plug away at the game you'll unearth characters for use in the fairly dodgy two-player versus mode and all manner of other bonuses that almost make a second journey through the main mission worthwhile. Sure, you can team up with a friend and work through the game together (which, incidentally, is how you unlock many of the secrets) and make it a little more interesting, but once you've reached the end of Memory Lane there's not much to see. Which pretty much sums up the whole game: it's a non-offensive way to while away a few hours digging up the past, but the core gameplay doesn't hold a candle to the title it's so fondly remembering.



THANKS FOR THE MEMORY… WE THINK



The Dead Pool, remember that? You could knock people into the acid. It was quite good.

FINISH HIM

***Mortal Kombat* is best known for its Fatalities. Ever since the game first appeared in arcades, these gory finishing moves have caused equal amounts of joy (among gamers) and controversy (among non-gamers and the popular press). So it's no surprise to see Fatalities returning here, but there are also other finishers available – Brutalities and Multalities. Brutalities have changed a little from *MK3* and are essentially your smart bomb, allowing you to dice up everyone on screen with a single hit, while Multalities let you turn any enemies in the immediate area into a bloody lump of mess. To be honest, we really wanted Babalities and Friendships to make a comeback. Still, you can't have everything…**

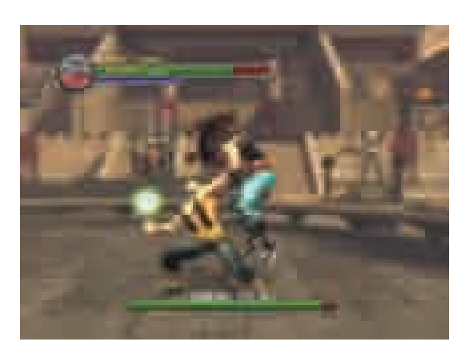
FAQs

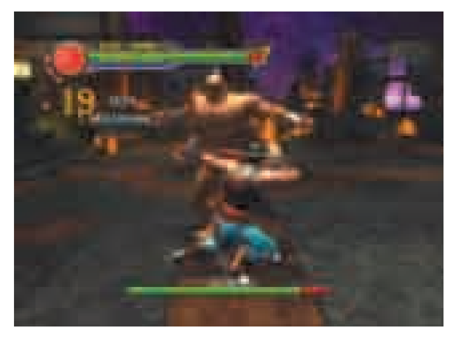
Q. ALL THE CHARACTERS?
Well, most of the ones from *MKII*. There are a few faces from the other games, but not many.

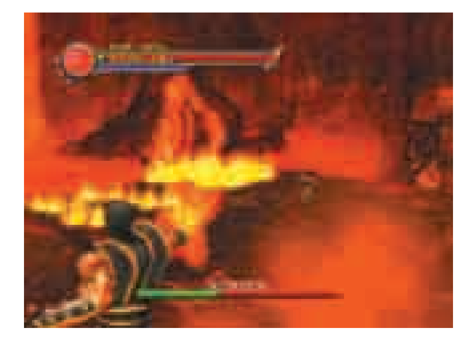
Q. ALL THE MOVES?
Surprisingly, yes actually. Every character has had their moves implemented somehow – and none of them seem that cheap.

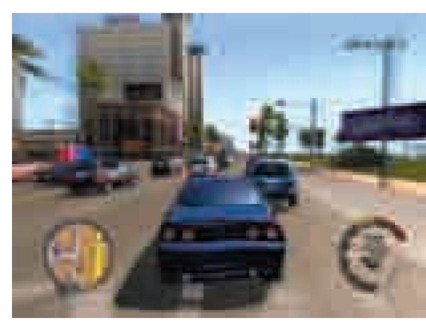
Q. HOW MANY LEVELS?
Seven really, but there's quite a bit to unlock after you're done.



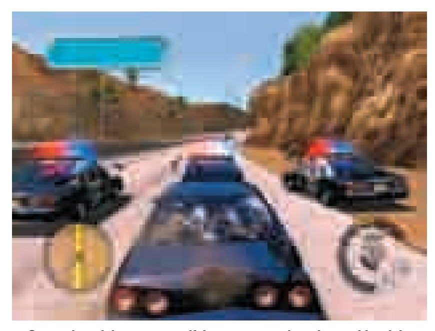








In *L.A. Rush*'s defence, there's usually a decent amount of traffic on the road to avoid and/or hit.



Outnumbered three to one – if the cops weren't so dense, this might actually be quite a scary prospect.



All the open space of a construction site and he decides to nudge my ass. Some people have no road sense, I tells ya…

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

WCC REPRESENT: Take your ride to get tricked out by *Pimp My Ride*'s West Coast Customs crew.

STORY TIME: A silly Ebonics-riddled narrative drives the game forward in some minor way.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Midway

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

L.A. RUSH

LA CRUISE, MORE LIKE

You're probably getting pretty sick of street-racing games by now, right? All that modding, all those pink slips floating around – it's enough to make you want to return to the simplicity of Micro Machines. Not that you need an excuse, of course. But now, just in time to save you from having to play the next *Need For Speed* game, here's something a bit simpler. *L.A. Rush* is the ultimate in idiot-proof racing sure enough, but that's not necessarily such a good thing.

Midway's latest *Rush* is riddled with annoyances. A single mistake (or a piece of 'divine intervention' from a police force that seems to have nothing to do except get in your way) in the closing stages of a high-stakes event will see you ploughing another 30 minutes into earning enough pennies to enter the race again, before crossing your fingers and hoping you don't get screwed again. Stunt missions are a trial-and-error collect-'em-up session with a stupid visual effect that makes your eyes hurt. Cut-scenes are rammed with attitude and street talk as the tenuous 'story' unfolds. And unlike many of its street-racing brethren, there's no real sense of speed to speak of. Naturally, it gets quicker as you progress but the early races are hardly what you'd call thrilling, even after the West Coast Customs boys are done with your 'whip'.

But despite how it might sound, *L.A. Rush* really isn't that dreadful. In fact, at times it even borders on 'pretty good fun' and it's the freedom of the Los Angeles setting that helps it to accomplish this. Once you get a feel for it, the game controls well enough (albeit rather loosely) and cruising the city is a decent way to while away an hour or so. There's plenty to jump off, jump over and jump into, often accompanied by a suitably cinematic (read: distant and angular) camera cut. And once you learn a course, it's pretty easy to keep replaying that race to earn more money. Whether or not you want to do so is a different matter…

Ultimately, *L.A. Rush* isn't bad so much as uninspiring. Driving round the city is fun for a bit but after that nothing but the mediocre races, ill-conceived stunt sections and the meandering extra missions remain. It's a slimline, no-frills approach to the genre – the antithesis of *Juiced*, if you will – and in terms of accessibility, it couldn't work better. But if you're looking for something a little more personal or intense, *Midnight Club 3* and *Burnout Revenge* respectively are a much better bet.

VERDICT 5/10
A FAIR YET MUDDLED STREET RACER

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION

EA PULLS ITS HARD-HITTING SERIES BACK FROM THE RINK

NHL 2006

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, GameCube, PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4 (2 Online)

This year has been pretty hard on the world's ice hockey fans. After disputes between the League and Players' Association over salary caps, the entire 2004-05 season was cancelled, making ice hockey the first major American sport to miss a year due to labour issues. Of course, this didn't stop the EA sequel machine putting out its 2005 edition – in all fairness, it would have been something of a financial error to spend all that time and money on a game only to can it. In fact, Electronic Arts was probably helping to keep many fans sane, giving them their essential hockey fix for the difficult elongated dry period. But for the rest of us, there's a general consensus that the 2005 update, while still playable, simply didn't have the magic that the series promised several years back. Rejoice, then, for your friends (and ours) at EA have continued their hot streak and made *NHL 2006* the best the series has been for quite some time.

Every type of player is catered for over the spread of game modes, from the casual gamer who wants to jump straight in, to the aficionado who wants accurate rules, stats and matches over a full season. The Dynasty mode is terrifyingly in-depth, even for those who are used to the leagues of *Pro Evo* or, indeed, most sports games. As well as editing your rosters and keeping fans and owners happy, you'll have to juggle financial issues and perform well off the rink – it's far closer to an actual management game than any similar mode we've seen.

But it's on the ice that the real magic happens. The fast-paced action controls like a dream, with new functions allowing you to set up better plays than have ever been possible before and a refined shooting system to make your star players a genuine threat in front of goal. Presentation is also flawless, an EA trademark but still wonderful for creating a true atmosphere for the game. Crowds get behind the action, tempers flare and even the resulting fights are ingeniously designed and have a real sense of weight to them.

Like golf games, hockey titles have a fan base that spreads far beyond that of the sport itself, and as the greatest and most enjoyable recreation of the sport since the 16-bit era, *NHL 2006* deserves to sit alongside the likes of *Pro Evo* as a sporting highlight that any gamer can enjoy.



"Hey, you two, stop dancing and get on with the game. I don't know. They think they're goddamned Torvill and Dean."

gamesTM ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

RETRO CHIC: Fancy a trip back in time? Pick up the PS2 version and enjoy *NHL '94* again as an extra.

GOING LIVE: Whichever version you get, you can take on the world. Except on the Cube, obviously.

NHL 2005



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

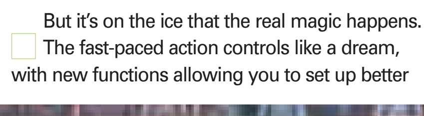


NHL 2002



VERDICT 8/10

THE *PRO EVOLUTION* OF ICE HOCKEY



"Time out! I'm sorry, I believe I may have severed something in the groin-type region."





Here's the whole good vs evil problem personified. We'd recommend taking the evil route simply because, unlike in life, the police won't be called.



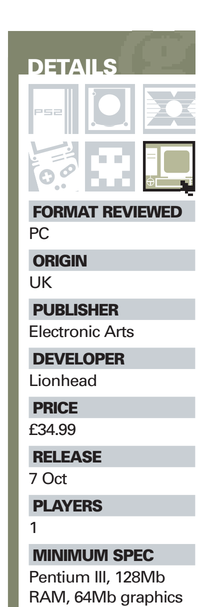


One of these innocent animals can be corrupted for your own evil ends.



BLACK & WHITE 2

A SECOND HELPING OF GODS, MONSTERS, MILITARY AND MAGIC



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
Lionhead

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
7 Oct

PLAYERS
1

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium III, 128Mb RAM, 64Mb graphics card, 1Gb HDD space

If there was one criticism levelled at the first *Black & White*, it was that it lacked direction. Initially, people were rightly blown away by the undoubtedly fresh scope and dynamic of the game; after a few hours of flinging boulders, toying with Tamagotchi-like creatures and grappling with the minutiae of town micro-management though, things got repetitive. All the elements were there, save perhaps the most important: gameplay – and it's this that Lionhead has reputedly been busily weaving into the fabric of *Black & White 2*. Indeed, rather than craft an entirely new game mechanic, the studio has been building the game that the original *Black & White* should have been back in 2001. But has it been worth the wait?

Those who played *Black & White* will feel instantly at home with the sequel, as things kick off in an almost identical way to the first outing. Upon starting a new game, your godly presence is called upon by the prayer of a Greek villager whose people are in need of some divine intervention. What follows is a cleverly integrated tutorial in which you're introduced to the technicalities of navigation and manipulation by your two moral guides; one a peaceful old angel, the other a chaos-loving, nipple-tweaking demon. Your on-screen presence again takes the form of a disembodied hand; left clicking interacts with items in the game world, while holding the right or middle button enables you to drag, spin and tilt the view. It's a simple system and it mostly works. However, there are still the problems with accuracy that blighted the original game in that it's all too easy to select or pick up the wrong object when you're dealing with pressing ecumenical matters.

So far, so samey, and *Black & White* veterans will be wondering why part two has taken Lionhead so long to produce. However, when you're eventually thrown into the game proper it soon becomes clear just where all the hard work has gone. First, your creature (be it ape, lion, wolf or cow) has been transformed into an astonishing mix of fur and AI that can now be properly trained to do your bidding. Where the first game left you to cheer or chastise your digital beast without much of an idea of what you were achieving, the creature now gives you an insight into its actions via textual thought bubbles. When you catch it pondering the virtues of defecating on one of your villagers, you can now jump straight in and either whack the thought out of its head or goad it into dumping its load. As you work, a meter appears above the creature giving feedback on the effect you're having, so there's no time wasted aimlessly disciplining your beast when you've got far more important things to do.



You want your beast to exercise free will? Fair enough, but we'd recommend goading it into pestering a few villagers. Go on – it'll be a laugh.

games™

FUSED

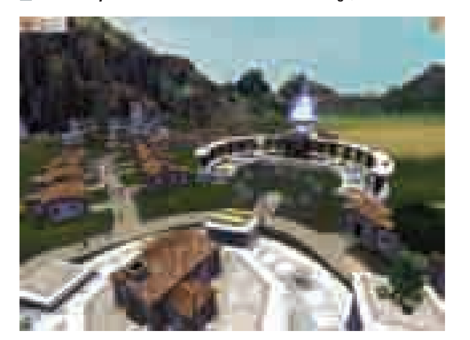
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

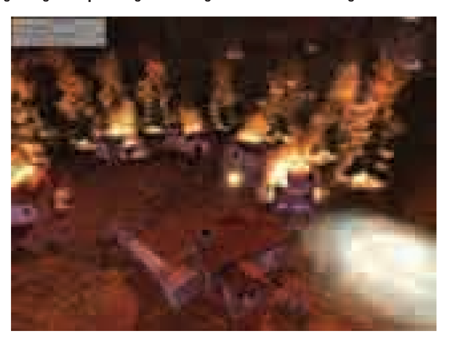
RPG-HEAVY: Shape the world through your actions be they fire and brimstone or flowers and kittens…

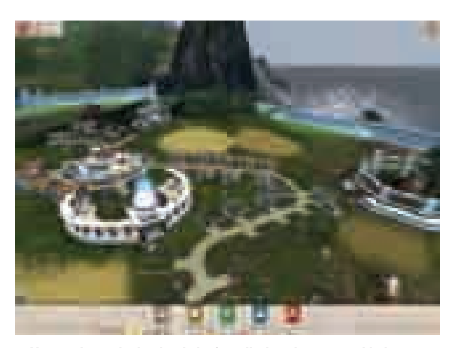
RTS-LITE: Use your godly powers to send archers, swordsmen and siege weapons to flatten your foes

PLANNING PERMISSION

Laying out settlements in the first *Black & White* was a tedious affair, but things are much improved in this outing. In fact, city-building is now one of the most rewarding and enjoyable aspects of the game, largely thanks to the elegant and intuitive interface. Roads can be created by clicking on any part of an existing pathway and dragging out a new route, and subsequently placed buildings automatically snap to streets to form complex, yet organic-looking neighbourhoods. To select items to build, you can use a new construction toolbar, drag out the villagers' desired building from the town centre, or drag a blueprint from any existing building on the map. Finally, construct huge, imposing walls around your settlements to keep enemies at bay with a quick click-and-drag combo.







Your settlement's clearly a hub of goodly thoughts, so now it's time to negotiate with your neighbours and spread the love.

Lionhead has also integrated a pretty decent story in the game, so much of your time will be spent advancing through a plot that may as well have been plucked from the pages of Greek mythology. Your Grecian tribe has fallen foul of a marauding Aztec god (forget the geographical inconsistencies), and in order to open a can of metaphysical whup-ass on said deity you need to build up your divine influence by constructing huge cities and convincing neighbouring Norse tribes to worship at your altar. You can do this by either building such an awesome city that enemy tribes will want to relocate (that's the good path), or by amassing such a powerful army that you can stamp the opposition into submission (the bad path, obviously). Your hand, creature and cities will evolve depending on your moral choices, with good settlements becoming a picture of glistening white marble, while evil towns take on a decidedly Mordor-like décor.

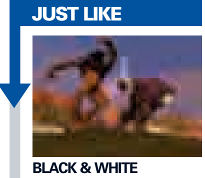
Which brings us to perhaps the most welcome and obvious addition to the *Black & White* universe: effective real-time strategy. Instead of relying on your creature to fight opposing armies, you can now create and control troops to fight truly epic battles in your name. Watching melee, ranged and siege units going at it en masse, you can't help but think of *Rome: Total War* as the swords clash and boulders fly. However, don't be fooled into thinking that the army manoeuvres offer a similar degree of strategic finesse as The Creative Assembly's military masterpiece. The RTS elements work well enough, but really they amount to little more than just another cog in your mighty machine of forced indoctrination.

In all, though, few can deny that these improvements have made *Black & White 2* a resounding success. The trouble is that gamers were expecting many of these things four years ago. Since its original release, the *Black & White* brand has been unfortunately, yet somewhat deservedly, labelled as a great idea that proved disappointing. It'll be a difficult mantle for the sequel to shake off, but for those prepared to dive back into Lionhead's impeccably crafted world of gods and monsters, a divine experience awaits.



VERDICT 7/10

NOT PERFECT, BUT STILL A GREAT SANDBOX GOD SIM



FAQs

Q. CAN I CAST SPELLS VIA MOUSE GESTURES?
Yes, though the ability is not yours by default. You have to buy it with your hard-earned Tributes.

Q. TRIBUTES?
When you complete objectives, you earn Tribute points. Use these to buy things like buildings, miracles and creature toys.

Q. CREATURE TOYS?
You wouldn't want it getting bored, would you? Nothing passes the time better than sticking pins in a voodoo doll.

AND YOU THOUGHT CHEERLEADING WAS JUST FOR GIRLS…

OSSU! TATAKAE! OUENDAN

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

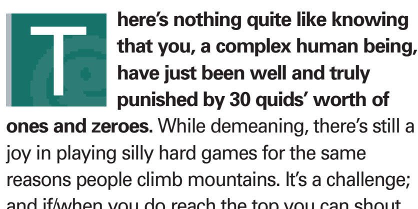
PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
iNiS

PRICE
¥4,800

RELEASE
TBA (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1 (2-4 via Wi-Fi)



There's nothing quite like knowing that you, a complex human being, have just been well and truly punished by 30 quids' worth of ones and zeroes. While demeaning, there's still a joy in playing silly hard games for the same reasons people climb mountains. It's a challenge; and if/when you do reach the top you can shout about your achievement to the entire world. With few exceptions, it's usually the rhythm-action genre that presents the most challenging gameplay experiences – in too many cases these days, difficulty can be put down to broken game mechanics rather than a lack of player skill. You've seen DDR players doing their Michael Flatley bit in the arcade, Bemani experts spazzing out like well-trained octopuses, but a musical stylus going bonkers? Welcome to *Ouendan*…

With three simple commands, *Ouendan* couldn't be easier. Combining taps, slides and spins in tricky, well-planned sequences, the movement and activity make this one of the most involving rhythm-action titles in years. To further enhance this, the top screen plays an interactive anime while you jam out the tunes – perform well and you'll see the cheer squad's routine help out the hapless townsfolk. On its own, this may not sound much but the synergy of music, story and pattern really draws you in. You'll want to help the new gym teacher get his class of hot chicks to like him, genuinely enjoy fighting off sickness with the power of song, and when you reach the ghost boyfriend stage, only the most stone-hearted of gamers could claim to not be even a little upset. We were totally ruined. Seriously.

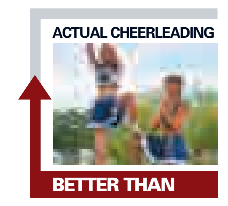


This guy wants you to do well – the fate of a lovelorn secretary or a crime-fighting horse is in the balance.

But as we've mentioned, *Ouendan* is an insanely tricky game. At its toughest, the patterns can actually be so hard to interpret that it comes down to either knowing the songs, intuition or, in the worst case, simple trial and error. But even then, it's nigh-on impossible to tire of *Ouendan*'s incredible style and choice selection of J-rock covers no matter how many times you have to sit through them. It may only have 15 tunes but when each is this well selected, implemented and accompanied, that's still more great songs than many music games can boast. Likelihood of a PAL release: very low. Likelihood of being hailed as one of the greatest games on the DS: very high. Just shut up and import it already.

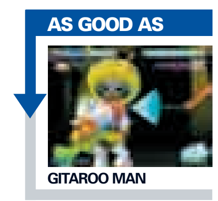
VERDICT 8/10
CHALLENGING, STYLISH AND WICKEDLY ENTERTAINING

ACTUAL CHEERLEADING



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



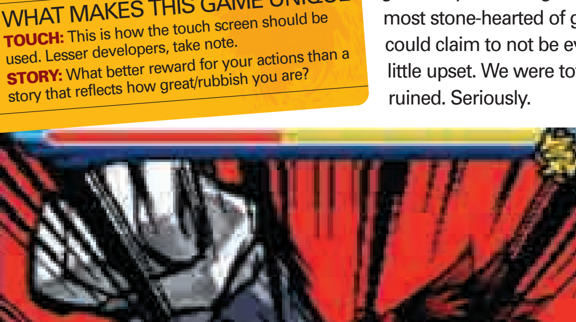
GITAROO MAN

FINGERPRINT
games™

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

TOUCH: This is how the touch screen should be used. Lesser developers, take note.

STORY: What better reward for your actions than a story that reflects how great/rubbish you are?



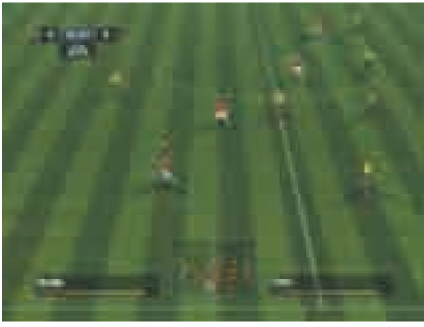


Try to concentrate on hitting the numbers, even though the background action is awesome.


eMag



The game really captures the televisual presentation – this shot wouldn't look out of place in the *MOTD* opening credits.



Those used to berating *FIFA* in comparison to *Pro Evolution Soccer* should know that this year's effort is better. Not by much, but still…



Even Gabriel Heinze's mullet is captured perfectly – shame his elbows-first approach to defending hasn't been motion captured.

ANOTHER YEAR, ANOTHER FIFA…

FIFA 06

DETAILS





FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, GameCube, PC, GBA, PSP, DS, Xbox 360

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
EA

DEVELOPER
EA Canada

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

If *Pro Evolution Soccer* didn't exist, *FIFA 06* would be superb. This year's version of EA Sports' multi-million-selling series plays a decent game of football, but in comparison to the latest *Winning Eleven* it just can't compete. The passing is crisp, presentation unrivalled, AI and animation much improved, and the game is finally starting to feel like real football, but it's still light years behind Konami's effort.

FIFA 06 does many things very well, however. The aforementioned presentation really is incredible, mixing the usual EA menu navigation and soundtracks with a depth that *Pro Evolution* fans can only dream of. EA's management sim, *Total Club Manager*, has been ditched this year and entirely integrated into *FIFA*'s Manager mode. While still not having the depth of *LMA* or *Football Manager*, the mode is excellent, allowing the player to create their own manager and handle their chosen club's day-to-day duties – including talking to the press and dealing with administrative and training staff. However, the transfer market is handled oddly, with negotiations using *Pro Evolution*-style 'points' as opposed to regular currency, which takes some of the shine off receiving a record transfer fee for your star striker.

When match day comes, though, *FIFA* once again sells itself short. At first glance, all seems well: the graphics are suitably shiny and the atmosphere is spot-on – stadium lighting and commentary are top notch and really add to the big match atmosphere. However, many of *FIFA*'s niggling problems are, once again, very apparent. Although this year's game is faster, it's extremely difficult to break away from the last line of defence because block tackling is too easy and, when mistimed, rarely goes punished. Matches often degenerate into midfield slogs, with both teams exchanging possession as the game engine struggles to keep up. Even worse is the shooting – still as difficult to control and poorly animated as ever. Watching Shevchenko pile into the box then proceed to shoot 30 yards wide from 10 yards out is not particularly satisfying. Especially as it happens far more often than it should.

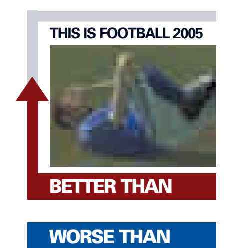
FIFA is improving, though. EA has clearly taken on board the criticism of previous titles, and is also very aware of the brilliance that is *Pro Evo* – it's now even possible to change the control system to one identical to *Evolution*'s. On the occasions when the game flows it's possible to produce some breathtaking football, but all too often matches slow to a crawl and it's extremely difficult to produce anything like a constructive passing move. Ah well… there's always next year.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
PASSING: When the game flows, passing almost reaches *Pro Evolution* standards of fluidity.
SPECIAL ONE: This year's Manager mode is a fantastic addition, lengthening the game's lifespan.

Gone are the days when boys played in the park with jumpers for goalposts. Isn't it?



BETTER THAN





THIS IS FOOTBALL 2005

WORSE THAN



WINNING ELEVEN 9

VERDICT 6/10
A VALIANT EFFORT, STILL PLAGUED WITH PROBLEMS

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-3

RESIDENT EVIL: OUTBREAK

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

RESIDENT EVIL 4

YOU THOUGHT ZOMBIES WERE DUMB? THINK AGAIN…

RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK: FILE #2

After the rather pointless *Resident Evil: Outbreak* – an online game without online options – Capcom has seen sense. Yes, *Resident Evil Outbreak: File #2* is online (hallelujah) and playing alongside reliable human players rather than AI enhances the experience significantly. There's a sense of camaraderie that playing with bots lacks – for example, lean up against a door to keep the undead horde at bay and team-mates understand the danger and help out. However, the limited commands render advanced plans almost impossible. The human element sees the series inching closer to the group survival horror dream to which Capcom is clinging. That said, online options can't conceal basic design flaws.



On the rare occasions the lazy AI stirs into action, there can be some tense moments. It never feels scary though.

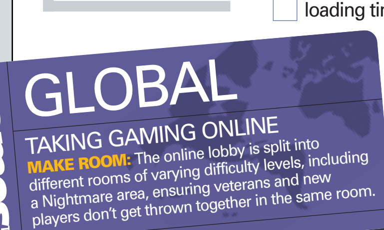
This is a merciless game with no sympathy for anyone using the clumsy inventory screen, and seeing as how the team ethic means you juggle health items and weapons with your team, you're often left open to attack. Button short cuts further confuse the muddled controls, and the lack of atmosphere doesn't help as limited music, cut-scenes and awkward pacing mean there's never the crescendo of fear for which the series is famed.

Offline, this is '*Outbreak 1.5*'. Slightly quicker loading times, slightly longer levels, but it makes the same mistake as its predecessor – your partners' AI isn't far removed from that of the zombies. Commands are often ignored or misunderstood, team-mates rarely take the initiative, partners clog their inventory with useless items and the whole experience is too misshapen to be enjoyed. It'll also take a keen eye to spot what useful changes have been made.

Ultimately, when playing offline, *File #2* serves as a reminder that the broadband adaptor is missing from the back of your PlayStation2. Online though, *File #2* just about survives its many flaws to warrant curio status for series veterans and online play addicts.



VERDICT 5/10
ONLY JUST WORTH BREAKING OUT BROADBAND FOR



GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
MAKE ROOM: The online lobby is split into different rooms of varying difficulty levels, including a Nightmare area, ensuring veterans and new players don't get thrown together in the same room.



Sticking together is the best tactic, if only so there's someone on hand for those "Out of ammo!" moments.



This level opens as a frantic dash toward a derelict hospital – great fun online, but offline your partners get lost.



Unlike the horribly cardboard jungles found in *Vietnam*, the only enclosed places here are the interiors. Thank goodness…

There's nothing quite like a successful tactical assault in a squad-based videogame. Five minutes of planning, shouting orders, positioning troops and scoping out the enemies' positions before hitting a few buttons and watching your elite troop of soldiers jump into action, obliterating everything in their path. The cacophony of noise, smoke and gunfire dissipates, and your men are left alone, triumphant among a sea of bodies. The silence that follows is just reward for your tactical expertise, and even though it's just enemy AI that you've conquered, when the AI is as good as *Conflict: Global Storm*'s, there's no shame in feeling proud.

Global Storm is a rousing return to form for the *Conflict* series. After a horrific tour of duty in *Vietnam*, Pivotal has decided to resurrect the military careers of Jones (Jonesy), Bradley (Bradders), Connors (Connage) and Foley (Foley or, occasionally, the Folinator), heroes of the Desert Storm campaigns. The player gains a certain camaraderie with their soldiers, and it can be



CONFLICT: GLOBAL

GOOD SHOOTIN', JONESY – YOU NEVER LET ME DOWN



distressing to watch old Jonesy take a bullet in his friendly face. However, this time out there's a new addition to the *Conflict* squad: a few hours in, and Foley goes MIA in Colombia, so it's up to female hotshot sniper Carrie Sherman to step up to the plate. It's refreshing to see a strong female character in a modern videogame – Sherman's every bit as integral to the team as the men, and there are no unnecessary fake breasts or thongs in sight. Who would have thought a *Conflict* game could be so forward thinking?

Equal rights are not the only area in which Pivotal has been applying itself. The aforementioned AI has undergone a significant overhaul, and although slightly inconsistent at times, provides players with some of the most cunning foes to have ever graced a combat videogame. Enemies work in teams, spreading out to find cover or working together to outflank your squad. It's simultaneously disheartening and rewarding to be out-thought and outfought by a group of binary enemies. As embarrassing as it may at first seem, it's followed by a comforting realisation that games truly are progressing. However, *Conflict* shatters this fragile illusion a little too often, with enemies that stand still and stare right into your eyes, not reacting until they have a stomach full of lead, or streams of terrorists that run *GoldenEye*-style round a corner in a mad rush to die. It's such a shame when *Global Storm*'s suspension of disbelief is broken by these moments, and, unfortunately, they're too common

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Pivotal Games

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4



Think you can take down a chopper with just a machine gun? We'd like to see you try, soldier.



STORM

to ignore, leaving the game with some of the best, and worst, enemy AI out there.

Thankfully, your own squad is considerably more alert than the schizophrenic enemy. Direct them toward a building and they'll infiltrate, clear and protect the rooms with genuine military precision. It's a terrific sight to behold, and knowing you can trust your team to not behave like under-trained chimps in the heat of battle makes for a greatly enhanced gameplay experience. The only downside to this is an occasional over-reliance on the skill of your squad. It's all too easy to dish out a few 'cover me' commands and play the game like a first-person shooter, running headlong into rooms, blasting all and sundry while your team-mates clear up any of the stragglers. To do this, though, would be to miss the point, and to deny yourself some fairly well realised squad-based action.

Global Storm's controls have been streamlined this time out – actions such as healing a fallen companion or laying a C4 charge are now context sensitive, removing unnecessary menu scrambling and allowing the game to flow. Giving orders is still unfortunately clunky, however. The problem stems from the limited number of buttons on a console controller as much as anything else, but it can take a combination of up to five or six button presses to order the squad to perform a simple manoeuvre. This over- complication can once again lead the player down the FPS path; when



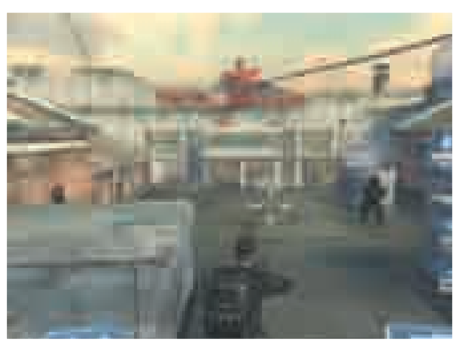
Global Storm's environments are far more convincing and interesting than those found in previous games in the series.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
CLEVER GIRL: Enemies flank you like raptors in *Jurassic Park* – it's genuinely worrying at times.
THIS WILL HURT: Heal comrades with one press of a button thanks to added new context sensitivity.

faced with a choice of blasting everything in sight or spending five minutes organising a tactical assault, only to press the wrong button and watch your team suffer a shoeing, it's all too easy to go for the former. However, with discipline and patience, all manner of tactical possibilities open up, and *Global Storm* must be praised for offering the player as many options as it does (see 'Go! Go! Go!'), even if they are difficult to achieve.

Conflict: Global Storm is such an improvement over the debacle that was *Vietnam* that it's amazing to think they both came from the same developer. Graphically, *Global Storm* is impressive, especially the neon hue of urban Korea, and the gameplay, although inconsistent, certainly hits more often than it misses. Just like Jonesy. Good old Jonesy.

VERDICT 7/10
AN ENJOYABLE OUTING FOR JONESY AND THE GANG



The ability to pilot vehicles remains intact, and it feels slightly more solid and controllable this time around.

GO! GO! GO!

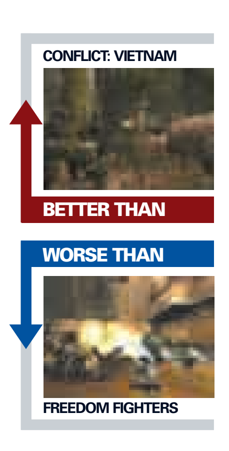
Conflict: Global Storm **certainly doesn't shy away from offering the player a large, and sometimes overwhelming, number of tactical options and orders. The usual 'move', 'cover' and 'hold' orders are easier than ever, but the real innovation comes in the form of a 'delay order' feature. This means it's possible to co-ordinate an assault by assigning orders to each one of your squad then moving into position yourself before hitting the button and having everyone act simultaneously. When done correctly, this is tremendously satisfying and useful, but it's all too easy to mess up the orders somewhere down the line and watch one of your men run out into no man's land while the rest of the team remains covered. Still, innovation mustn't go unmentioned.**

FAQs

Q. IS JONESY IN IT?
Yeah, he's all over it. With a shotgun in his hands and a glint in his eye.

Q. AND IT'S BETTER THAN VIETNAM?
Yessir. Almost infinitely so.

Q. AH, BUT IS IT BETTER THAN THE DESERT STORM GAMES?
Yes again. The AI makes it a damn sight more realistic (apart from when it's wrong).



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Hot-B

DEVELOPER
Taito

PRICE
$29.99

RELEASE
TBA (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

GRAFFITI KINGDOM

We all know that gaming is evolving in a number of ways. There are Nintendo's new approaches to the way games are played, the next-gen idea of increased scale, and, more appropriately for this review, a boom in customisation within games. Character creation, level development and even freedom within lesser elements of games are becoming the norm. But if you've ever wanted to generate a character as big, small, nimble or chunky as you choose, then you're in luck; *Graffiti Kingdom* lets you do just that.

Our first foray into creature creation didn't go quite as well as planned. Little Tompey was a strange purple embodiment of a lack of artistic talent, complete with misshapen limbs and a wobbly nose. But it wasn't until we dropped him into the game that we realised his most horrible ailment. Poor Tompey was sideways. As he scuttled around like a two-legged jelly crab, the next two hours of hysterical laughter alone were worth the game's asking price. With time and experience, though, came new levels of creative proficiency and we soon designed some pretty impressive creatures. We're still no closer to the examples on the box, but our Wizbit might just be good enough for Mr Daniels to consider a lawsuit.

The game itself is a basic action RPG – make a creature, assign it moves, and journey through the colourful areas battling other odd monsters to level up. With each couple of levels comes a new feature for your creations, and by taking on the form of an enemy you often acquire stronger abilities. It's all about finding the most appropriate moves for your ramshackle heroes – a long-legged freak will excel with kick moves while one without arms or legs will be limited to tackles and slams.



The name says it all really. Oh, the joys of being super-creative.

It's surprisingly balanced, giving creatures with longer limbs huge start-up times for moves during which they can be interrupted, while smaller creations throw blows with lightning speed.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
OPEN YOUR MIND: Even from the off, you'll be able to create some fantastic things…
NO LIMIT: …but once you start unlocking body parts, the potential grows exponentially.

And that's about it. It's unfortunate that the design aspect is so much more entertaining than the game itself but that's not to discredit the actual adventure – it's still a perfectly enjoyable action RPG title that just suffers from being a little simple. There are loads of areas to explore, monsters to capture and things to kill. Just expect to spend a lot more time in the art room than you do saving the world.

VERDICT 6/10
VERSATILE AND FUN, BUT OH-SO-SIMPLE

MAGIC PENGEL
BETTER THAN

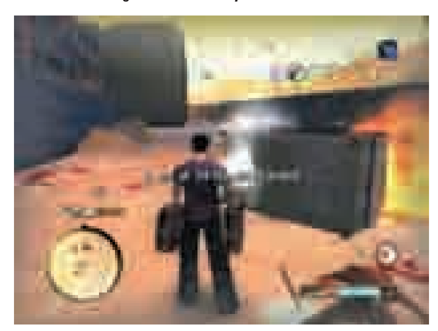
WORSE THAN
KINGDOM HEARTS

Long arms = better, right? Wrong. The game is fairly well balanced, despite its freedom.






Take a look at one of the spicier moves, the wall-walk, in action. It's almost enough to summon an 'Ay Carumba'. Almost.


'El Mariachi' is one of the *Total Overdose*'s more useful and amusing special moves, despite being somewhat slow.



Much of the scenery is destructible, and a great deal of it is prone to exploding, thereby notching up more points from your kills.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
LOCAL COLOUR: Mexican accents, sombreros and tequila all add a certain spice to proceedings.
EL GRINGO LOCO: Having an ex-con character allows for some ridiculously violent exploits.

"EH, GRINGO! YOU WANNA BUY A SOMBRERO?"

TOTAL OVERDOSE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox
OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, PC
ORIGIN
UK
PUBLISHER
Eidos
DEVELOPER
Deadline Games
PRICE
£39.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1

It would be very easy to dismiss *Total Overdose* as a wonky *Grand Theft Auto* imitation. This, however, would be wrong. *Total Overdose* may let you steal cars and roam freely around an enormous but generic Mexican city, but it's also an action game focusing on scoring points, chaining kills and collecting points to improve your health, arsenal and abilities. The better you get at the game, the more it rewards you with weapons and moves that allow you to dish out yet more punishment to the banditos and drug lords of the Mexican underground.

The plot is suitably Bruckheimer, following hardened criminal Ramiro Cruz and his twin brother, an undercover cop, as they infiltrate the Mexican criminal underworld on a mission to trace the man they think killed their father. Ramiro the ex-con handles all the action and can perform several *Max Payne*-esque slow-motion special moves (or Spicy moves, as the game likes to call them), from evasive dives to running up walls. During the actual missions and challenges, *Total Overdose* is action-packed and genuinely enjoyable. In fact, it's not long before the game's very distinctive character is revealed. Character is something that a lot of games lack these days, and with its Mexican theme, well-conceived story and commendable voice acting, not to mention the ability to steal people's hats, *Total Overdose* has it by the bucket-load.

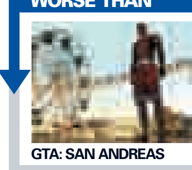
Sadly, character can't save the game from becoming repetitive and frustrating after a few hours, when the charm has worn off and the shot-dodging, city-roaming and mission-finding starts to run into one long and rather tedious point-scoring exercise. Wandering in the city is rarely fun, with nothing but the amusing AI of the pedestrians to entertain you as they leap in front of cars or run away from you only to smack into something and fall over. Thankfully, a handy Missions menu will save you from having to roam around for extended periods, but after the first few missions you've really seen all there is.

The big problem with *Total Overdose* is that it gives everything up at once, and though the story is likely to keep you playing, the appeal of the actual gameplay wears off quickly. What you're left with is an amusing, individual game that delivers an initial hit of fun but whose essential concept becomes stale.

VERDICT 6/10
ENTERTAINING BUT GETS REALLY OLD, REALLY FAST

DRIV3R

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

GTA: SAN ANDREAS

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
7 October
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

HEY, GIRL – SHOW US YOUR PUPPIES

NINTENDOGS

When something comes along that makes us look at games a bit differently, it's usually something big and impressive. Something along the lines of *Mario 64,* which introduced us to the real possibilities of 3D, or the PlayStation, which almost single-handedly transformed gaming's audience. Things that change people's perception of gaming are very rare and when they do arrive, they tend to cause quite a fuss.

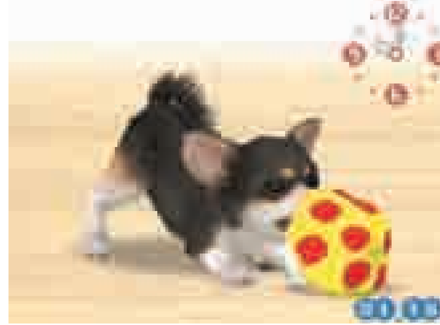
Nintendogs is neither big nor impressive, and it probably won't cause much of a stir in the gaming community. It's not even really that good, if you consider what most gamers see 'good' as. It's very, very simple and theoretically you'll have seen pretty much all of what it has to offer within a few hours. And yet *Nintendogs* probably will alter some peoples' perception of gaming, even if only slightly. It's one of those titles with the potential to open doors, to act as a stepping stone to something more significant. Accessibility is becoming a consistent theme in DS titles, and *Nintendogs* is the most accessible game you'll ever play. It's the kind of thing that you could show to your non-gamer partner or child or mum and provoke an immediate desire to play, instead of just the feigning of mild interest. It's the embodiment of all Nintendo's recent talk about introducing gaming to non-gamers; it has the potential to generate an interest from a demographic that never before would have given it a second look.

Owning a virtual puppy in *Nintendogs* is simple. You never even have to touch the buttons or D-pad; stylus and voice are all you'll need to form a bond with your new pet. Feeding it, petting it, handing it toys or taking it for walks are all matters of touch. Training your canine is slightly trickier, but still intuitive. Repeat voice commands to your puppy on a regular basis and it will come to associate your voice with the action. Well-trained puppies can perform everything from a simple 'sit down' to an enthusiastically athletic 'backflip'.

The easiest comparison to make in order to convey both *Nintendogs*' appeal and its limitations is *Animal Crossing*; a game that, to the untrained eye, is slow-paced and a bit laborious, extremely simple and essentially quite limited. However, it has that same magic charm that had many of us sitting in front of our GameCubes collecting fruit and furniture and sending nonsensical letters to polygonal alligators day after day, week after week, month after month. Where *Animal Crossing* was essentially a collect-'em-up, *Nintendogs* is the same; though you'll have fed, played with and brushed your pup within an hour, thereby experiencing pretty much everything that you can do, collecting all of the game's items on walks is a long-term prospect. Of course, collecting things is only the most basic 'purpose' of the game, if indeed there is one. In *Animal Crossing* your bizarre relationships with the animal townsfolk were what kept many people playing, and the same

Collecting accessories for your mutt is key – though clearly, a Luigi hat isn't exactly fashionable.





Although care is essential, dogs will also entertain themselves.





Spot a present lying on the street and you'll have to yank your dog's lead if you want him to pick it up and give it to you.

is true with *Nintendogs*. The sheer cuteness of the whole idea should have even the most heard-hearted player enamoured with their little puppy for a considerable while, but the intuitiveness of the touch and voice-based interaction forges a deeper attachment over time.

Despite its charm, however, *Nintendogs* remains very limited. By now the average gamer will have come to expect slightly more from their games than what this one offers. Once you've taught one puppy all its tricks and aced the competitions (which shouldn't take more than a week or two with consistent training), there's nothing left to do except buy another, different puppy and do it all over again, or continue walking your dogs in order to find more essentially pointless items. This isn't actually a very deep game, if a game in the conventional sense at all – it's more of an experience.

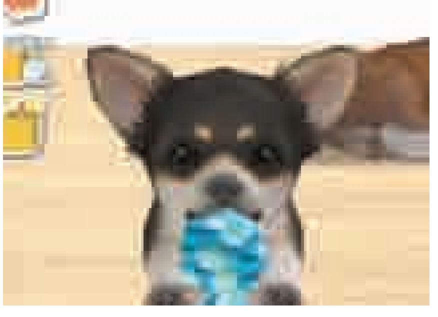
All of this makes it very difficult to pass judgement on *Nintendogs*. It's charming and captivating for a while, certainly, but probably not forever. It's intuitiveness and accessibility deserve to be praised, but the restricted nature of the gameplay doesn't make it the most profound gaming experience in the world. It is what it is, and you'll either fall in love with it or fail to see the point. Hand it to a non-gamer, however, and you'll elicit a much less critical evaluation of the game's merits than the one found here. *Nintendogs* is fun. It's cute, and a bit silly, and extremely easy to play and enjoy. It's a relatively new sort of videogame, and one whose premise doesn't have much to do with hours of play or complexity or purpose. It's a game that might cause someone who's never had a console to buy a DS and perhaps start looking around at other sorts of games. If this is where Nintendo is going with the DS – and this appears to be the case – we're going to have to start looking at its games in a slightly different light. And that can only be a good thing.



games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

GETTING TOGETHER: Wirelessly hooking up with your mates gives your pup the chance to play with others and develop its caring side. You can also trade items, breeds and interior decoration styles.



Ah, a good old fashioned tug 'o war – you pull on one end of the rope and your dog will do his best to yank it away from you. Lovely.



VERDICT 7/10

A UNIQUE AND CAPTIVATING, IF LIMITED, EXPERIENCE

ALL THE SMALL THINGS

The only real material incentive to play *Nintendogs* for extended periods of time is to accumulate more and more cool little items for your dogs to wear, play with or bark at threateningly. Such items are found scattered around town while out on walks, or can occasionally be bought from pet supply shops. Aside from some typically self-congratulatory Nintendo-themed accessories, such as Mario and Luigi hats, there are many toys and items to make your puppy's life more pleasant. Dogs are much happier to be left alone when there's a soothing jazz record on the player, or a toy or two lying around for them to play with in your absence.

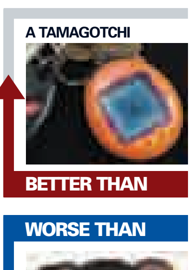
FAQs

Q. DO I HAVE TO BUY ALL THREE VERSIONS?
No – you'll can actually unlock all the dogs through a single game.

Q. BUT I WON'T HAVE ALL THE BREEDS...
There's a good selection – and by trading with friends or earning lots of trainer points, you can unlock them all.

Q. SOUNDS LIKE TOO MUCH HARD WORK...
Believe us, virtual puppies aren't a chore. *Nintendogs* is oddly compulsive.

A TAMAGOTCHI



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



A REAL PUPPY


"I fell into a burning ring of fire. I went down and the flames went higher…". Not so much a man in black as a man in armour, but hey ho.


The guy at the front started singing *Walk This Way* and everybody else just followed. What else were they going to do?


Hack, slash, hack, slash, romp, romp, romp. And yet on such a grand scale it's actually better than that.

IMMORTALITY! TAKE IT! IT'S YOURS! WELL, SORT OF…

SPARTAN:TOTAL WARRIOR

DETAILS




FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, GameCube

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
Creative Assembly

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

In approaching this game, you should know that despite almost sharing a name and an engine, *Spartan: Total Warrior* has very little to do with *Rome: Total War*. Where the latter favoured historical accuracy and complex, strategic thinking, *Total Warrior* is all about arcade action and features a storyline which, chronologically, is absurd. This game was never intended to be about historical accuracy, though; the focus here is upon bringing the player closer to the epic battles depicted in *Total War*, giving him a direct hand in proceedings and affording him the opportunity to directly influence the outcome of monumental fights, with a single warrior.

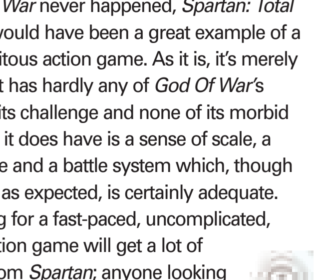
We've been promised on several occasions that *Spartan: Total Warrior* is not going to be your typical hack 'n' slash action romp. Happily, in many ways, it isn't. The sense of scale here is commendable; while early battles take place in relatively confined spaces, the player will soon be leading hundreds of troops in a charge against Roman legions on a vast open battlefield. There's always plenty of action, with upwards of 100 enemy troops on screen at a time and a variety of weapons with which to wreak destruction. Boss battles, though occasionally frustrating and quite traditional in nature, provide some of the game's highlights as the Spartan warrior goes up against some of Greek mythology's impressive monsters.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
GREEKS 'N' ROMANS: A new approach to the Romans' conquering of the Greeks in videogames.
MYTHOLOGICAL MADNESS: Situations drawn from all of Greek history characterise the game.

However, in several aspects, *Total Warrior is* your typical hack 'n' slash action romp, which is where it lets itself down. Despite their awesome scale, there's a notable lack of complexity and skill in the game's battles. There's a range of weaponry but essentially only two attacks: one for tackling single foes and one for sweeping up the masses. The game can easily turn into a button-basher however much the developer may have insisted it wouldn't. Despite promises of a complex battlefield, when facing multiple identical enemies, repeatedly using the same attack-shield-bash combo or two is often the only effective strategy.

If *God Of War* never happened, *Spartan: Total Warrior* would have been a great example of a simple, gratuitous action game. As it is, it's merely a good one. It has hardly any of *God Of War's* gore, little of its challenge and none of its morbid appeal. What it does have is a sense of scale, a great storyline and a battle system which, though not as varied as expected, is certainly adequate. Those looking for a fast-paced, uncomplicated, traditional action game will get a lot of enjoyment from *Spartan*; anyone looking for something more may be disappointed.

VERDICT 7/10
FALLS SHORT OF LEGENDARY STATUS

DYNASTY WARRIORS 5

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

GOD OF WAR

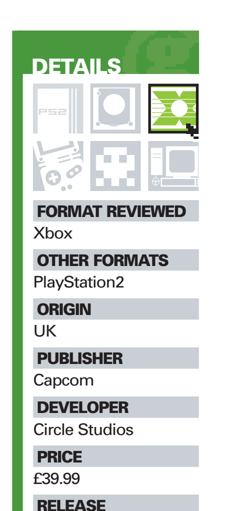
This dodgy bridge caption could move us on from Johnny Cash to Simon and Garfunkle…



CONSIDER YOURSELF WARNED

WITHOUT WARNING

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
Circle Studios

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
28 Oct

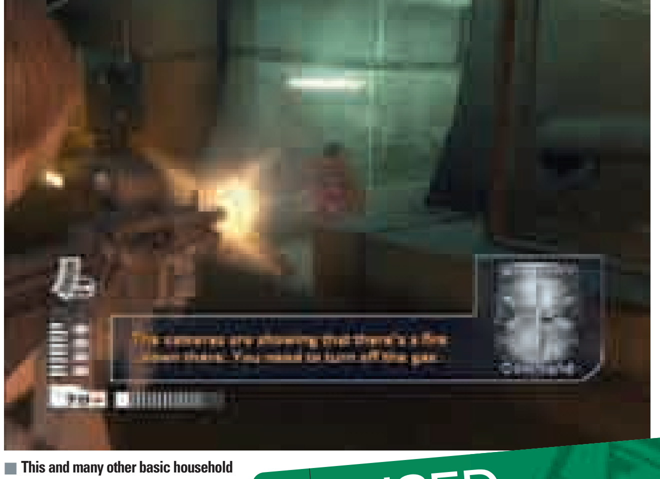
PLAYERS
1

It is perhaps ironic that the ambling plot of Circle Studios' first title begins with the suggestion that the mission ahead is 'by the numbers'. Of course, with this being published by Capcom you'd be excused for expecting better from *Without Warning* – after all, the company seems to have the golden touch lately. Undoubtedly though, this is a mixture of missed opportunities, stale concepts and complete ineptitude; a grab bag of what you wouldn't want from an action adventure.

That's not to say that *Without Warning* doesn't try hard – some concepts seem clever if a little misguided. Spreading the progress of the game's story over a 12-hour period and then leaping back and forth along the timeline to create a crossover of events is neat, if slightly plagiaristic. That this leaping then encapsulates six unique playable characters (three Special Forces soldiers, a receptionist, a security guard and a reporter) mixes things up as each character has their own weaponry and abilities; from assault rifles to pepper spray, bomb disposal to using a video camera. Conceptually, it could have worked – if the game underneath wasn't such hard work, that is.

The laughably inconsistent AI stands out as the biggest flaw. Enemies happily run out into oblivion before stopping to reload their weapons (allowing you to mow them down), and yet can often detect your presence almost psychically before spraying you with bullets whether they have a chance of hitting you or not. Likewise, the fractured target system is often able to detect and lock onto unseen enemies, while at other times is incapable of targeting a terrorist in front of you. The over-the-shoulder camera also has a clumsy life of its own – switching from left to right, zooming in and out… it's incredibly unwieldy compared to something like *Resident Evil 4*, especially when combined with a targeting system that can leave you looking at your feet at the most inopportune moment.

This could have been so much more, but the shoddy engine and woeful AI let down some fairly solid and slightly confusing concepts. Just like its releases of *Robin Hood: Defender Of The Crown* and *Rogue Ops*, we hope *Without Warning* teaches Capcom a valuable lesson: if you want something done properly, do it yourself.



This and many other basic household safety warnings are brought to you by *Without Warning*. Well, certainly this one…

games™ FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

GO, GO, GO: Crack marines vs evil terrorists – that old favourite keeps coming back to haunt us

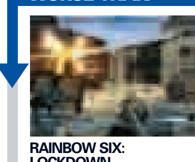
TICK TOCK: The shifting timeline works to a degree, but can also prove confusing and repetitive

COLD WINTER



AS GOOD AS

WORSE THAN



RAINBOW SIX: LOCKDOWN

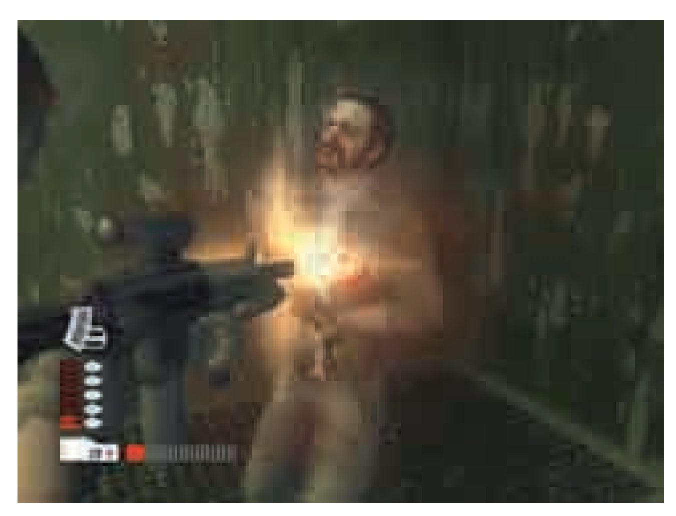


VERDICT 3/10

BROKEN IN PLACES, HORRIBLY DULL IN OTHERS

Some rudimentary puzzles help to break up the rudimentary shooting.






JAKE
0009700
RAY POWER



Much scarier than the Planet Of The Apes **Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters – Arcade [Atari] 1989**


eMag


RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.37 OCT 2005
00p
THE MONTHLY OLD-SCHOOL SOFTWARE REVIEW
GREATEST GAME EVER
PAPERBOY
THE ARCADE CLASSIC
HARDWARE LEGEND:
PANASONIC 3DO
CGEUK
We spill the beans on the UK's greatest retro gaming event
FIRE PRO WRESTLING
Get the lowdown on yet another classic gaming franchise
SUPER MARIO KART
Forget following the yellow brick road, the rainbow one is much more fun...
PLUS
RETRO REVIEWS,
RETRO NEWS,
WORST LICENCE EVER,
BUYERS' GUIDE,
ULTIMATE COLLECTION,
RETRO CONTACT
AND MUCH MORE...

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

Over the next few weeks several videogame compilations will be begging you to part with your hard-earned cash. *Sonic Gems, Taito Legends, Capcom Classics* and *Midway Arcade Treasures 3* will all be available and represent both the best and worst of the videogame industry. While some offer utterly superb value for money and give you a staggering amount of games for your £20, others simply appear to be cashing in on our nostalgia.

And sadly, it's this cynical cashing-in that's seriously ticking me off. Yes, companies want to make as much money as possible, but I'm a gamer and just want to play classic games. When I pick up one of these compilations, I want to play the same game I played as a nipper. I've no interest in playing poorly converted racers that share little in common with their arcade counterparts, nor do I wish to replay the same titles that have already appeared on countless other compilations by the company in question. And don't even get me started on 'plug-and-play' titles…

Fortunately, games™ Retro doesn't believe that just because a game's old it's automatically any good, so wait until next month's reviews for the full lowdown on the latest batch of compilations. In the meantime, have a read of this issue to pass the time…



Darran Jones, Retro Editor

YOU SHALL GO TO THE BALL

NEW RETRO EVENT AIMS TO RAISE MONEY AND AWARENESS…

We've barely recovered from CGEUK '05, but a new retro event is already being planned for this December. Going by the interesting name of the Retro Ball and sponsored by Console Passion the event is the brainchild of Chris Wilkinson (of Digital Arcade), Pete Beverley and Lee Kooper. All proceedings from the event will go towards Everyman, the charity that funds research into male cancers, particularly testicular cancer. Eager to find more about this worthy event we managed to track down Chris to get the lowdown.

Q: How hard has the Retro Ball been to organise?

CHRIS WILKINSON: It's not been that difficult at all as we've already received great support from various celebrities and exhibitors. I've met many individuals from the retro gaming scene and all have been extremely helpful. Console Passion's Andy Brown has agreed to sponsor the event, while Sensible Software's Jon Hare was the first celebrity to sign up.

Q: So how will the ball differ from this year's CGEUK?

CW: Retro Ball's venue is being split into several different gaming zones: game playing, competitions, trading and socialising. The zones are based on specific themes and will comprise a number of different systems running games from that genre. In the Fighting Zone you may see *Way Of The Exploding Fist* on the ZX Spectrum, *Soul Calibur* on the Dreamcast and everything in between. Each area of the venue is being 'fuelled' by the main bar, so as the day progresses we're really hoping that the social aspect hits full steam.

Q: Any reason why you've chosen to support a charity?

CW: We're not organising the event for self gain but purely for the challenge of putting on a hopefully great event at which seasoned and new retro enthusiasts can play a huge number of systems and games under one roof and have a drink at the bar and talk about the nostalgic times of the past. The fact that Everyman can benefit from the event is a rather special bonus.

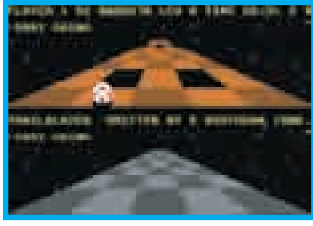
Q: Why is the event running over two days?

CW: Of the events I have attended over the last couple of years the ones I have enjoyed the most have spanned the whole weekend, with Saturday being the most busiest and intense day. Sunday is normally the day of reflection, a day of having one more go on your favourite system, a time to say goodbye to old and new friends, and a time to nurse the hangover acquired from the socialising of the day before.

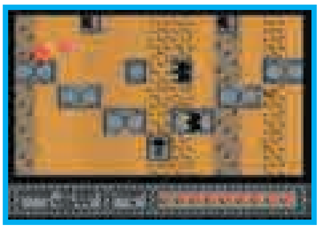
Q: What are you hoping to achieve with the Retro Ball and will it eventually become an annual event?



▲ It's called a ball but you needn't worry about the black tie or evening gown.



▲ Hey – that kind of looks like a ball, which is appropriate, really.



▲ There'll be plenty of chances to get your hands on some classic games at Retro Ball.

CW: We're hoping to attract 400-500 visitors. This will ensure we get to hand over in excess of £3,000 to the Everyman project. If this event is a success then there may well be a second event next year. Under the Play4Charity name we can support different charities in successive events and theme each appropriately.

■ Visit www.play4charity.co.uk to get your Retro Ball tickets.

GAMING NEWS

Space Ace

THE SPACE HARRIER RECORD GETS BROKEN AT LAST

While this year's CGEUK played host to Billy 'Perfect *Pac-Man*' Mitchell and a host of American gaming champions, the real hero of the day was a quietly spoken, bespectacled 34-year-old from North Cheam in Surrey. Nick Hutt achieved a new world record of 35,774,740 on Sega's 1985 classic *Space Harrier*, surpassing the previous high score, which had stood for two decades, by almost four million.

"It hasn't really sunk in yet," admits Nick. "There were so many people cheering me on and the atmosphere was great. It felt like being back on Eastbourne Pier in the Eighties."

The assembled crowd – including Walter Day from the official scoreboard for videogame world records, Twin Galaxies – saw Nick turn in a polished performance. As he hurtled through the 18 waves of one-eyed mammoths and sinister Easter Island heads, he demonstrated that the key to a high score comes on the penultimate level.

"Stage 17 is the only one where the end-of-level guardian just keeps getting faster," he explains. "The trick is to hang around and keep shooting what he throws at you, really pushing up your score, and then killing him just before it gets to the point where you can't avoid taking a hit. Or the machine crashes."

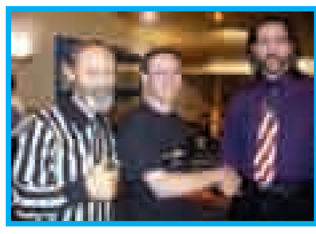
Nick has perfected this technique since buying a small sit-down *Space Harrier* in 2003. Having studied the manual, he realised he could upgrade to the full-motion cabinet he'd always dreamed of owning.

"I never thought I'd be able to get one through my front door, but the manual showed me how to dismantle the machine so I could squeeze it in. I then spent ages trawling eBay and I finally got one at the start of 2005 from Paris for £400."

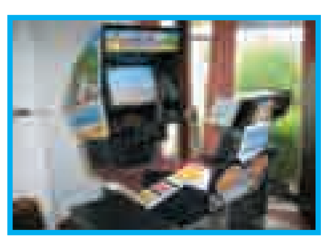
Then began the mammoth task of restoring the machine to something like its former glory. Undaunted, Nick has recently acquired a full-motion *Out Run* in need of TLC and is planning to build an extension to his home to house the two cabinets.

When Nick isn't repairing his cabinets, he's still working on his score. His personal unverified high on *Space Harrier* is almost 37 million, though his ultimate goal is to top 50 million and thus trigger the 'special ending', which sees our hero riding into the sunset astride a dragon.

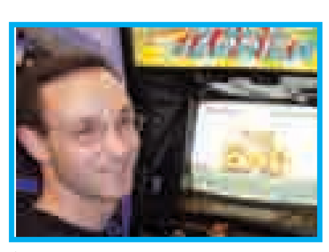
But have Nick's arcade skills brought him the fame he deserves? He pauses. "Well, I did get recognised in my local chippy."



▲ Walter Day and Billy Mitchell show some decent transatlantic love for Nick Hutt.



▲ Have you got one of these? Course not – that's why you're not a world record holder.



▲ You want an air of quiet satisfaction? How about being the best in the world at *Space Harrier*?

Retro DIARY

As old-school gaming gets more popular, it's about time everyone knew about upcoming retro releases and events…

OCTOBER '05

Sonic Gems Collection

Date: 7 October **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** TBC **Format:** PS2/GC

After years of putting up with us harping on about it in the Retro section, new gamers will be able to see if all the fuss over *Sonic CD* is justified. Other titles include a re-jigged *Sonic The Fighters*, the PC version of *Sonic R* and several Game Gear titles from *Sonic Mega Collection Plus*.

Taito Legends

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Xplosiv **Price:** £19.99 **Format:** PS2/Xbox/PC

Unlike Japanese gamers, UK retro fans are going to receive all sorts of Taito goodness when this fantastic retro collection arrives. *Operation Wolf*, *The New Zealand Story*, *Elevator Action*, *Bubble Symphony*, *Rainbow Islands* and *Rastan* are just a few of the games to be included.

Namco Museum 50th Anniversary Arcade Collection

Date: TBC **Publisher:** Namco **Price:** £19.99 **Format:** PS2/Xbox

The Xbox and PS2 get another dose of old-school arcade action with this collection of 14 Namco titles. The likes of *Pac-Man*, *Galaxian* and *Pole Position* will jostle for space with *Rolling Thunder* and *Galaga*.

Capcom Classics Collection

Date: TBC **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £19.99 **Format:** PS2/Xbox

Another 'best of' retro compilation, this time from Capcom. Some arguably fine titles are included (*1942*, *Street Fighter II*, *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*) but will a few extras make this a worthwhile purchase?

NOVEMBER '05

Tecmo Classic Arcade

Date: TBC **Publisher:** Tecmo **Price:** TBC **Format:** PS2/Xbox

Tecmo has an interesting compilation lined up for the end of the year. While it's got some highly addictive games on it, including *Bomb Jack* and *Solomon's Key*, many of the titles are quite obscure. But with only 11 titles to choose from, value for money could well be an issue…

Sega Classics Collection

Date: TBC **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** TBC **Format:** PS2

Sega's latest compilation features remakes of many of its classic arcade games and is available for PS2. *Golden Axe*, *Out Run*, *Space Harrier* and *Columns* are just a few of the games on the disc.

DECEMBER '05

The Retro Ball

Dates: 3-4 December **Location:** The Wardens Cricket Club, Kenilworth

Price: Saturday £7.50; Sunday £5; Weekend £10.00

Jon Hare, David Whittaker, Andy Nuttall and Ben Daglish are just a few of the Retro Ball guests and we'll be going along as well. Tickets are extremely limited and can be ordered from www.play4charity.co.uk.

If you know of, or are hosting, any retro events, please contact the Retro Editor at darranj@paragon.co.uk

THE GRAND DAY OUT

This year's CGEUK had it all: world records were smashed, almost a thousand visitors attended and Archer Maclean nearly suffered a heart attack when a poster was stuck to his immaculate Missile Command cabinet without permission. It was quite a day…



▲ Archer Maclean kindly brought several of his precious arcade cabs to the event, but kept a close eye on them…

If proof were needed that retro gaming is gaining popularity, all the evidence could be found at this year's Classic Gaming Expo UK (CGEUK). Despite cancellations from various celebrities and a couple of poorly timed events the show – held in the middle of August – was a massive success, with Fairfield Halls once again playing host to over a thousand visitors. After missing last year's show we were determined to make CGEUK '05, and despite having to negotiate Friday afternoon traffic and one of the worst one-way systems in creation, we were soon setting up our stall in preparation for the big event.

After an extremely late night that saw way too much beer being consumed with various forum members, Saturday morning saw a quick trip around the hall before it opened to the public. While a few churlish visitors likened the main hall to little more than an oversized jumble sale this was far from the case. Though there were a multitude of games, computers and consoles for sale (many of the items in fantastic condition, if a little expensive), it was the interactivity that was most impressive. Every stall was creaking under the weight of portable TVs and various playable machines – all were cranked up to full volume and the effect was absolutely amazing. *Magical Sound Shower* seemed to be coming from every corner of the hall; the harsh sound effects of *Space Invaders* grated against *Super Mario World*'s familiar attract screen; while Hadokens and Shoryukens were trying to drown out everything else. If you closed your eyes it felt as though you'd stepped through a gaming portal where time didn't seem to matter any more – it was simply about the games, and the effect was overwhelming.

Once the doors opened at 10am it was obvious to see that we weren't the only ones who'd been entranced by all the machines on display. Pensioners played *Samba De Amigo* to the best of their abilities, eager kids flitted from one well-looked after console to the next, while their parents were content to just plop themselves in front of a BBC so they could once again tackle *Granny's Garden*. Perhaps the most astonishing aspect of the show, though, was the amazing atmosphere that swept the two floors of Fairfield Halls. "The fantastic thing about these retro events is the sheer amount of goodwill they manage to create," said CGEUK's organiser, Chris Millard. "Anyone and everyone is willing to chat about various things with people they've never met before, no matter what the topic." Perhaps if there were more retro events there'd be a lot less war in the world…"

Okay, so Millard's being slightly optimistic, but there's no denying that ▶

"ALL THE MACHINES WERE CRANKED UP TO FULL VOLUME AND THE EFFECT WAS AMAZING"

AN INTERVIEW WITH WALTER DAY, TWIN GALAXIES FOUNDER

Q: DID YOU ENJOY CGEUK '05 AND WHAT WAS YOUR FAVOURITE PART?

WALTER DAY: The actual event was a first class show. I liked the fact that British gamers are evolving so fast and driving the classic gaming arena to new heights. The UK players take the classic competitions very seriously and have demonstrated that they're not going to roll over and let the Americans dominate the classic competition field any longer.

Q: HAVING RECORDS BROKEN ON THE DAY MUST HAVE BEEN NICE…

WD: Definitely. The *Space Harrier* record was completely smashed by Nick Hutt, and Tony Temple came within five per cent of breaking the 20-year-old *Missile Command* record – another great indicator that British gamers are beginning to equal their American peers. Several Vectrex records were also broken by Michelle Stanton – it turned out to be a very good day.

Q: DO YOU THINK OUR ENGLISH PLAYERS CAN RIVAL THE US GAMERS?

WD: A true rivalry has been born. The UK players may be able to match the Americans within a few years; they just need more players to come out of the woodwork and start re-learning their old skills. The real key, though, is making the games available so that the arcades can breed a new generation of classic champions. America already has some wonderful classic gaming arcades, and similar facilities would greatly help UK gamers.

Q: SO WILL YOU BE RETURNING NEXT YEAR?

WD: Of course I will. What's most exciting for me, though, is that Chris Millard, CGEUK's founder, is being trained to be a Twin Galaxies referee and will soon begin conducting classic games competitions on an ongoing basis. America had better watch out because I wouldn't be surprised if the UK players sweep next year's contest.

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRIS MILLARD, CGEUK ORGANISER

Q: HOW WAS THIS YEAR'S EVENT RECEIVED?
CHRIS MILLARD: Fantastic, considering the amount of extra effort we had to put in to keep this year's show running. As you know, due to the collapse of Game Stars Live we were doubtful about CGEUK taking place this year, but everyone pulled out the stops to make it a great event once again.

Q: HOW MANY MORE PEOPLE ATTENDED THIS YEAR?
CM: We had around the same number as on the Saturday of last year's event, so it was getting close to 1,000. We also had many more guests than last year.

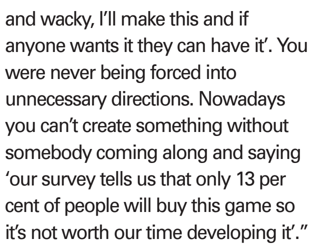
Q: WHAT WAS THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE SHOW FOR YOU?
CM: There's no one thing really – the show itself is a culmination of many hours of hard work, and to see people enjoying themselves gives me a terrific buzz.

Q: HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT SEVERAL BIG NAMES LETTING YOU DOWN?
CM: What can I say? These things happen. It's unfortunate because we have people coming from all over Europe to meet these gaming legends but the guests also have other commitments sometimes, which I guess take precedence at the last minute.

Q: A FEW PEOPLE ON YOUR FORUMS COMPLAINED ABOUT THE LACK OF ORGANISATION AT THE SHOW. WHAT'S YOUR RESPONSE TO THIS?
CM: It's always disheartening to hear negative comments, especially when they're not actually constructive. Considering our amazingly tight schedule and the near lack of CGEUK this year, I think we did really well. We have taken on board some of the constructive criticism and will endeavour to action those for next year's show. You can't please everyone, and if we change something because someone feels that it needs doing, you can bet that other people will want it back the way it originally was!

Q: IS THERE ANYTHING YOU'RE PLANNING TO IMPROVE FOR NEXT YEAR'S EVENT?
CM: Yes, we have quite a few things in the pipeline. First of all is the UK vs France videogaming tournament, and with this in mind, we are forming the UK Video Gaming Championships. The current staff being myself and Christine [Chris' wife], Nick Hutt, Gary Whelan and Michelle Stanton. We're going to try and elevate arcade game playing to the status it deserves! The first tournament will be announced on the new forums at www.ukvgc.com/forum soon, with the head-to-head matches taking place at CGEUK 2006.





▶ There were plenty of opportunities to go hands-on with a range of retro consoles, computers and arcade cabs.

these events tend to bring out the best in people. Archer Maclean, Ben Daglish and several Bullfrog staff were signing countless games without the slightest murmur, while Millard and his wife Christine were doing their utmost to ensure that all queries were answered and that everyone was enjoying themselves – we certainly didn't hear any complaints.

Perhaps the biggest coup of the day, though, was the fact that Millard had persuaded Walter Day of Twin Galaxies fame (the world's official high-score database) to hop across the Atlantic. Joining him were Billy Mitchell (videogame champion extraordinaire), Doris Self (who sadly failed to regain her record as the world's oldest videogames hi-score holder) and several other world record holders.

Walter and the rest of the Twin Galaxies crew spent most of the time either showing off their impressive gaming skills or simply watching other gamers in the hope that high scores would be broken, and luckily a few players either achieved this or came painstakingly close. Needless to say, Walter was very impressed.

"The UK is about to become a videogame superpower – especially in the classic gaming field," he revealed in the first of two press conferences. "We're hoping to develop a serious level of play between North America and the UK." Building relationships with the US wasn't the only thing on Day's mind though, and he unfurled a massive proclamation that would be taken over to France a few days later. Day is convinced that the differences between the French and English could be settled in a simple retro grudge match, which will now be taking place at next year's CGEUK.

Otherwise, the ever-talkative Billy Mitchell dominated the rest of the Twin Galaxies discussions; despite being incredibly assured of his own skills Mitchell was never arrogant and was totally unfazed by all the attention he was receiving. He's also never short of a good gag and had everyone in stitches when he suggested that the main reason Walter Day is never approached by people is because he looks like an escaped convict…

BULLFROG SPEAKS

Once the Twin Galaxies seminar had finished, the hot seats were taken by an impressive ensemble consisting of Archer Maclean and Jonathan Thompson (who had both lent plenty of machines for the event), David Shaw, Ben Daglish and the ex-Bullfrog trio of Alex Trowers, Andy Nuttall and Glen Corpes. The hour-long discussion was one of the highlights of the event and covered a variety of interesting topics.

Inevitably, the most talked-about subject was the difference between today's games industry and that of 10 or 20 years ago. "My biggest bugbear is this huge gulf between the games that were once written by veteran coders and the kind of games that are currently being churned out," began Daglish. "Once you had 14-year-old kids who thought 'this is interesting and wacky, I'll make this and if anyone wants it they can have it'. You were never being forced into unnecessary directions. Nowadays you can't create something without somebody coming along and saying 'our survey tells us that only 13 per cent of people will buy this game so it's not worth our time developing it'."

It's a frustration that was also shared by the former Bullfrog staff (now known as EA UK). "A decade or so ago when you were designing a game you were creating it for yourself," explained Andy Nuttall. "You'd design games that you'd really want to play, not because you were being told to."

Another annoyance for the panel is that story often takes precedence over gameplay mechanics. "When someone finds out what I do, they immediately tell me a great idea they have for a game," begins Alex Trowers. "They then go on to describe a great story for a first-person action adventure. 'But what do you do?' I'll ask them, and they'll explain how you have to rescue a princess. 'But what do you actually do… How do you move, jump, fire, open things; how do you do anything?' No one ever seems to consider that stuff nowadays, whereas that would have been the only thing that would have been considered back in the day."

Another interesting revelation from Trowers was the fact that EA is more than keen to go back to past licences – it just hasn't found the right way to approach them yet. News that a new *Syndicate* has

▶ A bit of bargain hunting could be enjoyed too, as well as not breaking the *Space Harrier* record (below).

been attempted at least three times – as well as a third *Dungeon Master* (that would have been set above ground) – drew interested murmurs from the crowd.

Despite the predictable subject matter, the two seminars proved highly entertaining with the second in particular giving some remarkable insight into how the industry once worked. In fact, the only disappointment was that the Twin Galaxies discussion was poorly scheduled and ended up clashing with Ben Daglish's superb acoustic set. With their performance taking place above the main hall, Daglish and Mark 'Madfiddler' Knight entertained the crowd with some superb acoustic renditions of Commodore 64 hits.

While it was a fairly short set, Knight and Daglish's enthusiasm certainly made up for it and even a string change on Daglish's guitar didn't hold up proceedings – Knight immediately launched into an impromptu performance of classic TV tunes that grew howls of delight from the crowd. If you haven't heard the *Knight Rider* theme played on a violin then you haven't lived…

As the day drew to a close, friendships were formed, items were purchased and plenty more alcohol was consumed. Twin Galaxies held an informal ceremony at the **games™** stall that saw UK gamers Nick Hutt and Greg Mott picking up awards for their impressive gaming skills. Hutt beat the 20-year-old *Space Harrier* record, while Mott came third in a high-score challenge.

After that it was simply a case of packing up, piling everything back into our car and teaching Doris Self that a set of traffic lights isn't really the best place in the world to flag down a taxi.

Let's hope that next year's show proves to be just as enjoyable. We'll see you there.

"HAVEN'T HEARD THE KNIGHT RIDER THEME PLAYED ON A VIOLIN? THEN YOU HAVEN'T LIVED…"



▲ You can rely on the power of retro to unite all sorts of gamers. How harmonious.

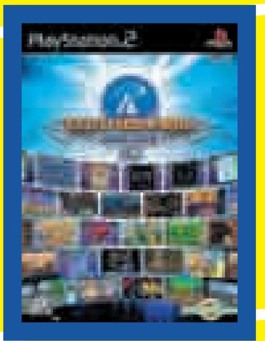
LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING

The most remarkable person at CGEUK was 80-year-old Doris Self. Travelling over from America with Walter Day and the rest of the Twin Galaxies team, the delightful pensioner was a joy to talk to. Despite coming across as incredibly delicate (Billy Mitchell acted as her bodyguard for the majority of the day) she became a totally different person when she sat in front of *Q-Bert*. Despite failing to retain her crown, Doris certainly made some good attempts. Her focus and determination was incredible, and after seeing the sheer amount of fun she was having it was easy to see why her weekend bridge game had been completely forgotten.





TAITO MEMORIES JOUKAN



Considering Taito's rich and diverse arcade heritage, gamers have been getting short-changed over the years. While the softco's been happily releasing *Space Invaders* compilations on various formats, its other titles haven't had quite as much exposure.

Thank heavens, then, that Taito has not only released two superb collections in Japan, but also has a third due in the UK soon. Each compendium contains some killer titles (with the odd stinker for good measure), all representing great value for money. *Joukan* (or *Volume 1*) has been available for a while now but has so many classic games on it that we just had to share them with you.

Retro Review

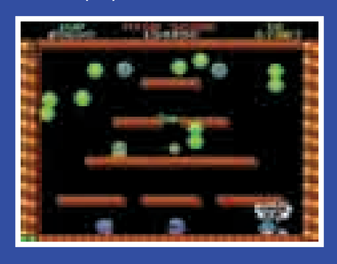
TAITO BEATS MIDWAY AT ITS OWN GAME

SYSTEM: PlayStation2 **PRICE:** ¥5,525 **PUBLISHER:** Taito **DEVELOPER:** In-House

BUBBLE BOBBLE

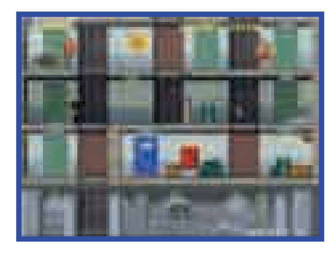
Never mind the fact that it's nearly 20 years old, *Bubble Bobble* is as enjoyable now as it was in 1986. There's no denying its simplicity – blow bubbles to capture enemies, then burst your captive foes with a headbutt – but beneath its cute exterior lies a surprising amount of strategy and depth.

There's a plethora of hidden bonuses to discover and the hellishly addictive gameplay means that you'll constantly find yourself returning for one more go. An utterly superb addition – it's just a shame you have to unlock it if you want to play it.



ELEVATOR ACTION RETURNS

It might not be as well known as some of its bedfellows, but the brilliant *Elevator Action Returns* is easily the highlight of Taito's compilation. Taking control of one of three agents, you must make your way through each level and defuse a set number of bombs. As the game progresses you'll find yourself traversing a variety of claustrophobic locations and blasting seven shades of God knows what out of the superbly animated enemies. Although already available for Sega's Saturn, that version's high price (around £50) makes this PS2 iteration a much cheaper alternative.



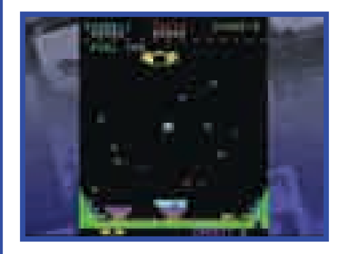
CAMELTRY

Any fans of 8ing's *Kuri Kuri Kururin* would be wise to check out *Cameltry* which shares some very similar principles. Taking control of a small ball the idea of the game is to negotiate a tricky, hazard-filled maze within a strict time limit. The difference here is that rather than moving your ball, you rotate the maze itself. It takes quite some time to get used to with the sensitive analogue stick but after a few attempts you'll soon be racing through each stage and racking up some pretty impressive times. A refreshing alternative to the compilation's many platform and shooting titles.



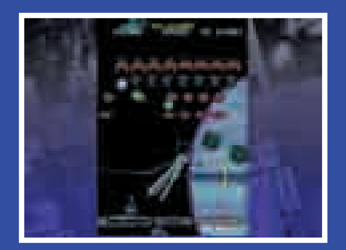
LUNAR RESCUE

***Lunar Rescue* may well be one of the oldest titles on the whole compilation (it was released way back in 1980) but that doesn't make it any less enjoyable.** Quite unlike the unadventurous *Space Invaders,* in *Lunar Rescue* there's plenty to get the old brain cells working. To start off with you need to negotiate a sky that's littered with asteroids and then reach some stranded astronaut types down on the ground; then you need to return them to your mothership while trying to avoid numerous UFOs. Ignore the quaint sprites and awful sound effects and just sit back and revel in the excellent old-school gameplay.



MAJESTIC 12 – SPACE INVADERS PART IV

Call us blasphemous heretics, but we can't stand the original *Space Invaders*. We can appreciate that it plays an important part in gaming's history, but the gameplay hasn't stood the test of time. It's just dull. Fortunately, the fourth *Space Invaders* outing is definitely worth a blast, if only to take part in the hilarious bonus round that sees you rescuing cows from deadly flying saucers. Multiple routes, nicely detailed sprites and some decent weapons all combine to create an original twist on the standard *Invaders* formula.



DARIUS GAIDEN

Shmup fans are well treated by Taito, as *Joukan* has been blessed with some solid (if not overly spectacular) shooters. While the likes of *Metal Black* and *Kyuukyoku Harikari Koshien* offer plenty of hardcore action, our favourite is definitely *Darius Gaiden*. It's incredibly tough but features stunning bosses, great music and extremely challenging gameplay. Add to all this a huge amount of multiple routes and a fantastic black hole-style smart bomb that sucks enemies into it, and *Darius Gaiden* will keep you going for absolutely ages.



RASTAN

The first thing that you'll discover upon playing *Rastan* again is that it definitely doesn't look as good as you remembered it being in the arcades; the second thing is that it's still as hard as nails. We like to think of ourselves as fairly accomplished gamers but even we were hard pushed to reach *Rastan*'s third level without using a rather hefty amount of continues. Nonetheless, even with the game's ropey visuals (check out the hero's hilarious animation) and pixel-perfect jumping, it's still a lot of fun to play. Just don't expect to one credit it any time soon…



PULIRULA

We've played some weird shit in our time, but nothing could prepare us for the sheer outlandishness that is *PuLiRuLa*. After Radishland has all of its time keys stolen, two young children must use their magic wands to beat the hell out of their opponents. This beating then turns the victims into cute animals that can be collected for points. Bizarre? Oh, you betcha. *PuLiRuLa* features some of the most outrageous sprites ever and once you've walked through a pair of giant suspender-clad legs and used a microwave as a smart bomb you may never look at games the same way again.



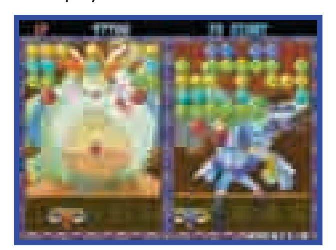
DON DOKO DON

Taito has released vast quantities of cutesy, single-screen platformers over the years and *Don Doko Don* is a sterling example of what we mean. Despite being a fairly obscure title (it only appeared on the NES and PC Engine) it's still managed to build up a faithful following over the past 17 years. Taking control of a bearded dwarf you have to hammer your opponents into submission and then throw them into each other for points. While it lacks the complexity of, say, *Bubble Bobble*, it's still a terrific title that definitely deserves to find a new audience.



CLEOPATRA FORTUNE

While Taito has been kind enough to include three puzzle games we've wasted the majority of our time on the excellent *Cleopatra Fortune*. Playing like a bizarre cross between *Tetris* and *Puyo Puyo* the object is to encase jewels and antiques by enclosing them in blocks; once the relics have disappeared the blocks will fall down into any available spaces. And if that wasn't confusing enough you can also make whole rows of blocks and antiques that will disappear. Despite the mind-bending premise, *Cleopatra Fortune* is wonderfully addictive and another must-play title.



AND THE REST

- SPACE INVADERS COLOUR
- ALPINE SKI
- THE FAIRYLAND STORY
- KIKI KAIKAI
- KURI KINTON
- SYVALION
- JIGOKU MEGURI
- FLIPULL
- KYUUKYOKU HARIKARI KOSHIEN
- RUNARK
- METAL BLACK
- GRID SEEKER
- SPACE INVADERS DX
- LIGHTBRINGER
- PUCHI CARAT

SUMMING UP

This is one of the finest retro compilations currently available on any system. Saturn versions of *Metal Black, Elevator Action Returns, PuLiRuLa* and *Cleopatra Fortune* alone will cost you well over £120 for the set, so *Joukan* offers amazing value for money. Cynics may moan that many of the vertical shooters lack any sort of a TATE mode, but it's a small quibble about what is an otherwise astonishing compilation. The only thing we can't understand is why Taito decided to lock a certain number of titles – after all, we don't want to work too hard for our retro thrills.

OVERALL 89%

Hardware Le

PRICE GUIDE

3DO SYSTEM – £40-70: Prices can vary depending on the model and what comes with it, though in Japan they're sometimes practically given away free at various 'junk softu' shops. We recommend going for the sleeker, top-loading FZ-10, since with fewer moving parts there's less to go wrong.

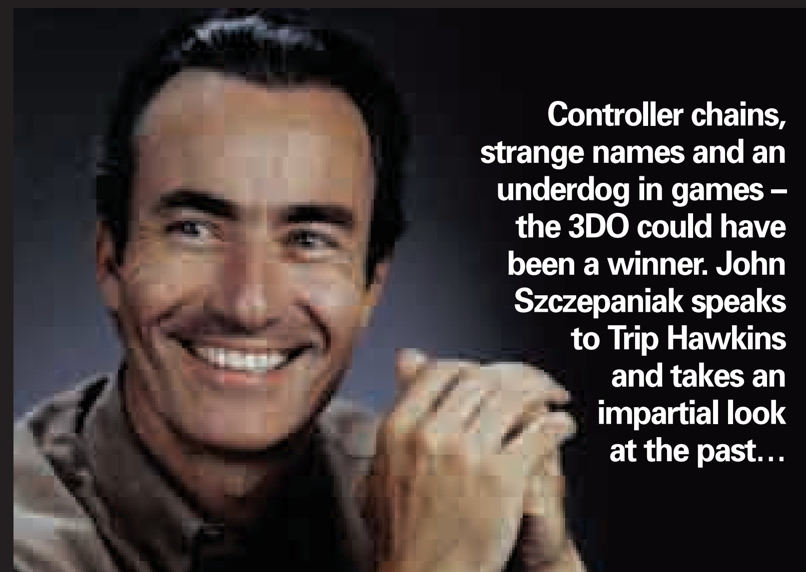
GAMES – £5: Most games such as *Return Fire* will cost you around a fiver or less. Of course, no 3DO collection is complete without *Star Control 2*, which goes for around £20 – a bargain at any price, but not always easy to find.

CONTROLLER – £8: A trip to online capitalist playground eBay reveals that these sublimely designed multi-linking pads can occasionally be bought unboxed quite cheaply. Friends willing to play on a 3DO may be slightly harder to come across, though.

M2 PROTOTYPE SYSTEM – $2,500: Getting hold of the 3DO's stillborn successor will set collectors back a pretty penny (or at least lots of dollars). It may have no games and be almost useless, but can you really put a price on the elite status that comes from owning a ridiculously rare prototype of unreleased hardware? Exactly.

gend

Retro Feature



Controller chains, strange names and an underdog in games – the 3DO could have been a winner. John Szczepaniak speaks to Trip Hawkins and takes an impartial look at the past…

3DO

The early Nineties was tough for the games industry, with money lost on many an unsuccessful venture. A number of firms released new hardware in an attempt to steal the crown from the empires of Nintendo, Sega and NEC, though all were destined for failure. The Atari Jaguar/CD, Bandai Pippin and Playdia, Fujitsu Marty, Amiga CD32 and, of course, the 3DO (among others) are all now regarded as disasters. But in some cases this judgement is unfair. Certainly the 3DO had great potential – it introduced many revolutionary features and deserved to fare better than it did.

The man behind the 3DO was Trip Hawkins (pictured above). He enjoyed a long and respected career in gaming, which boded well for any new hardware venture – after all, he was the founder of EA. In 1990 he made a breakthrough deal with Sega that would drive the growth of EA for four years, but he was still concerned about a lack of initiative from hardware developers. Their business models as well as lack of graphics power and failure to embrace CDs as a storage medium all suggested to Hawkins that the market would stall; for him the 3DO was an effort to improve this. His new company – also called 3DO – began as a project inside EA, bolstered by a development contract with New Technologies Group. 3DO was later spun out as a separate company and acquired NTG. "The name was the result of me wanting it to end in 'O' along with video, radio, etc, and someone else suggesting putting 3D in front of it," explains Hawkins.

3ARLY DEVELOPMENTS

NTG was led by Dave Needle and included RJ Mical, both of whom worked on creating the original Lynx handheld; this team went on to design the 3DO specs. Here things get interesting as the endeavour tried to incite a revolution that had already been tried with the MSX systems. The goal was to produce a single common design that could be licensed to manufacturers – in effect, a single unified format. Those who licensed the 3DO technology for manufacture were global companies like Matsushita, Sanyo, LG, Samsung, Creative Labs and Toshiba. Each would produce compatible systems according to 3DO's original specifications, while in some cases adding personal touches: machines sold in Japan came with extra memory and had their native character scripts built in, for instance.

Even at this early stage, decisions were made that would come back to haunt Hawkins. "The big obstacles, in hindsight, were that I set the [software] licence fee too low at $3 [per disc], which prevented us from



▲ Not satisfied with your regular 3DO pad? Then you'll be wanting one of these fine specimens. If you can find one, that is…

funding enough marketing and subsidy of hardware pricing. And we used a lot of RAM and a CD-ROM drive when it was still expensive for the latter."

The new technology drove up the development costs while the low licensing fees meant Hawkins couldn't offset the problem. Ironically, software companies didn't appreciate the low fees, complaining they were too high and instead went on to buddy up with other hardware developers and pay three times 3DO's fees. "Software companies were paranoid about who would sell enough hardware units so they bet on all the horses, but only 3DO suffered from being unable to fund its business by setting the licence fees too low," says Hawkins.

Meanwhile, the decision to make the 3DO region-free was based on what Hawkins thought was the right thing for the gaming public. He quips dryly that "it shows you just how far you go in the real world with such idealism". As for the ingenious multi-linking control pad that incorporated a headphone socket? That was down to the key guys at NTG. Hawkins encouraged them by highlighting the social value of having lots of people playing on one machine in one room. The resulting solution allowed each additional controller to be connected to the previous one. Surely one of the most phenomenal design decisions in the history of gaming, removing the need for multi-taps, but also one that has sadly never been copied.

Even when the price dropped to $499 by February 1994 the 3DO had a reputation for being pricey. The initial high price was due to Matsushita, since it was the debut supplier; 3DO itself had no way of regulating pricing, leaving consumers at the whim of the manufacturing partners.

Despite such high prices, people still salivated over games like *Crash And Burn* and *Need For Speed*. In hindsight it's easy to forget the atmosphere of the era but at the time there was nothing else like the 3DO, so gamers were justifiably excited. With later additions such as memory units, adapters that enabled VCD playback, hotel pay-per-play systems (only in Japan), arcade sticks and other peripherals, not to mention numerous games, the future certainly seemed bright.

"THE 3DO INTRODUCED MANY REVOLUTIONARY FEATURES AND DESERVED TO FARE BETTER"



▲ Whatever it is, shoot it. If it hits you you'll need more than windscreen wipers to clear up the mess.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

With the designs complete and 3DO looking set to take over the world, the press went into hysteria. Magazines that had reported on the unveiling at trade shows gave plenty of coverage, hyping the system's capabilities to incredible levels. Don't forget that at that time the two most visually impressive systems were the SNES and Neo-Geo, so the bold claims made about the 3DO's potential certainly seemed revolutionary. One publication even dedicated its front cover to the 3DO, calling it "the future".

The system launched for $699 in September 1993, making it far more expensive than any other console.

Rough estimates put the final 3DO software catalogue at around 340 titles. Of these, several were exclusive to Japan (*Policenauts*), exclusive to the system (*Immercenary*) or ports from other machines (*Samurai Showdown*), while others were infamously edutainment or strictly adults only (*Neurodancer*). FMV games were often superior to their counterparts on other hardware, like the fantastic *Psychic Detective*.

Along with the price, it was the lack of decent games and popular icons that killed 3DO. Despite some valiant attempts most games could be found on other platforms or came out too late to save the machine from the might of Sega and Sony.

Many games, such as EA's *Road Rash*, appeared as much as a year late. Meanwhile, almost no software made it across from Japan. The amount of high-quality 3DO titles released only in Japan is staggering. Games like *Yuu Yuu Hakusho*, the *Alone In The Dark*-inspired *Doctor Hauzer*, and simultaneous four-player game *Taiketsu!* still remain unknown to Westerners. Swathes of rubbish games and porn titles littered the system in its later years, which didn't help, nor did the lack of piracy protection. CDs were easy to copy and ran on standard machines.

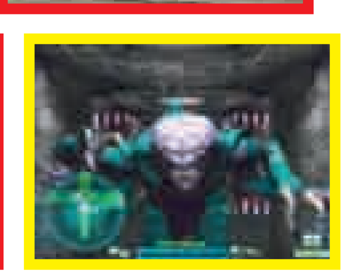
WHY I ❤ MY 3DO

I spent well over £100 buying a 3DO and having it sent from Germany, just so I could play an American copy of *Star Control 2* that had been shipped from Australia. Some would argue this implies eccentricity; I'd say it shows enthusiasm for an underdog that should have, but never quite, made it. It was well worth the price for *SC2* alone, but the addition of region-free games like *SSFII Turbo*, *Hell* and *Lucienne's Quest* among others, not to mention system exclusives such as *Immercenary*, made it shine. Yes, you had to look hard among the dross to find the great games, but they were there.

JOHN SZCZEPANIAK







▲ Hideo Kojima's *Policenauts* made its console debut on 3DO (top left) while Japanese gamers were also spoiled by the likes of anime-style fighters such as *Yuu Yuu Hakusho* (bottom left).

TH3 DREAM IS OVER

■■■ Hawkins announced the M2 follow-up to the 3DO in 1995, but 3DOs stopped being sold in 1996, leaving many developments unreleased. For example, 3DO built one of the first interactive broadband TV networks with TimeWarner and US West, which used a special 3DO model as the TV set-top box. It was trialled but never sold.

The M2 was completed although never got released. Wishing to pull out of the hardware market, Hawkins sold the technology to Matsushita. The price was a cool $100 million, which recouped the costs of his initial 3DO venture. (Legend has it that the person behind this deal at Matsushita was subsequently demoted and put in charge of a fish cannery.)

The M2 hardware looked ready for launch, with some games (including a rumoured version of Warp's *D2*) said to have been finished. Tech specs and screens of these titles showed the system to have far more power than the PlayStation, making it seem ready to conquer the market. Then the project was shelved.

"Once Sony waded in with guns blazing, Matsushita got that 'deer in the headlights' look and they just froze and didn't want to get into a battle with [Sony]," says Hawkins. "Sony committed and spent about $2 billion to force PlayStation to get off the ground. Neither 3DO nor its partners ever had even ten per cent of that budget or appetite."

"ALONG WITH THE PRICE, IT WAS THE LACK OF DECENT GAMES AND POPULAR ICONS THAT KILLED THE 3DO"

Regardless, 3DO's successor entered the public arena in various guises. The hardware made it into crippled media players apparently used for Chevrolet and Chrysler car presentations, as well as a 3D house-building system. Oddly, it also ended up in Japanese coffee machines and Russian ATMs. It was used to create arcade games, though only Konami developed any titles (*Poly Stars* and *Evil Night* being two of them).

Actual M2 systems are now pretty rare. A prototype system was bought for $20 at a North Carolina flea market by Stephen Flynn; it was then sold to Thomas Riemer in Germany for $2,500. Riemer tells us that there had only been one other M2 discovered in a similar though not quite as finished state, which sold for a comparable amount.

3DO the company continued to deal in software after the demise of the hardware, but filed for bankruptcy in 2003. Hawkins moved on and is now producing mobile phone games with his new company, Digital Chocolate, and applying the lessons learned from the 3DO. However, if the cards had only been played differently, the 3DO and M2 could have been successes that may have changed the face of gaming for the better. ●

Thanks to Trip Hawkins, Stephen Flynn, Thomas Riemer and Digital Press.

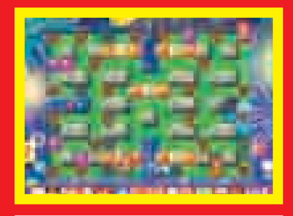


▲ The M2 prototype sold by Stephen Flynn to Thomas Riemer for $2,500. That's a lot of dollars, but come on – look how rare it is.
◀ Konami's *Poly Stars*, one of the few examples of software running on believed M2 hardware.



THE REAL THING

■■■ Like many of the other underdog systems released at the time, the 3DO has never been properly emulated. Of course, there's the ongoing FreeDO project (www.freedo.org) or you could try to acquire the ridiculously scarce Creative Labs 3DO Blaster card for PCs, allowing you to run actual 3DO games on a standard IBM compatible. Apart from the high prices they now command, the accompanying drivers, EISA interface and controller are all reported to be rubbish, meaning the only way to go is still to buy the original hardware. Let's just hope the on-board memory doesn't start dying…



▲ Four-player shenanigans in the shape of *Taiketsu!*, making full use of the interlinking controller design.



▲ Old favourites like the *Street Fighter* series cropped up on the 3DO, though they didn't really help shift the machine.





Greatest RETRO Game Ever

PAPERBOY

He'd be working in Tesco nowadays…

Release: 1984-91
Format: Arcade/Various Home Systems
Publisher: Atari
Developer: In-House

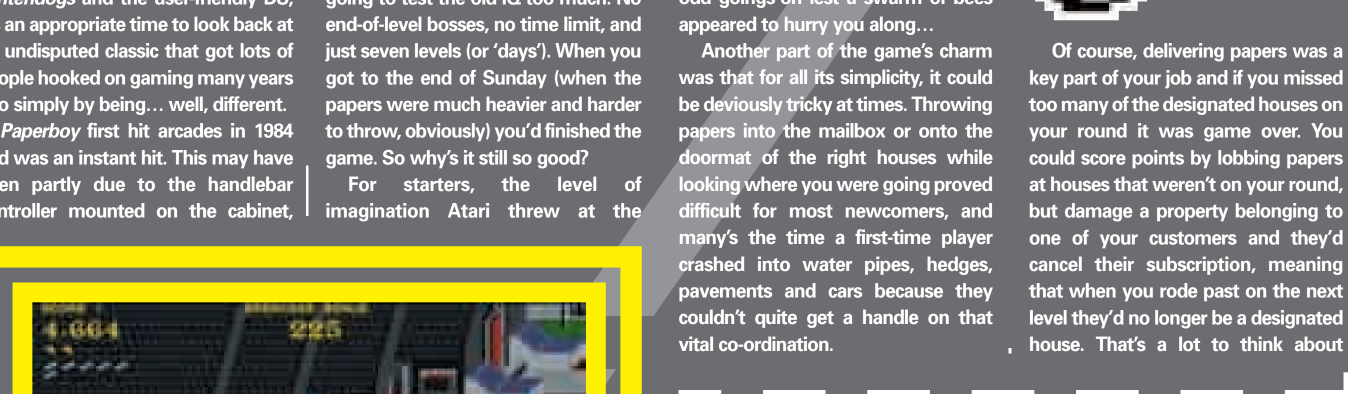
With Nintendo championing a return to simple gaming for all, with titles like *Nintendogs* and the user-friendly DS, it's an appropriate time to look back at an undisputed classic that got lots of people hooked on gaming many years ago simply by being… well, different.

Paperboy first hit arcades in 1984 and was an instant hit. This may have been partly due to the handlebar controller mounted on the cabinet, which made a change from stubby joysticks and contributed to the whole 'wind in your hair, oil on your trousers' experience of riding a bike. However, the game's big selling point must surely have been its ridiculously simple premise: deliver papers to the right houses while avoiding anything that might stop you fulfilling your task. And, er, that's it. There was an obstacle course at the end of each level, and a bit of traffic-dodging between the streets, but it was hardly going to test the old IQ too much. No end-of-level bosses, no time limit, and just seven levels (or 'days'). When you got to the end of Sunday (when the papers were much heavier and harder to throw, obviously) you'd finished the game. So why's it still so good?

For starters, the level of imagination Atari threw at the obstacles faced by the poor pedalling hero really livened up what could have been a trudge down any other suburban street. From the appearance of the usual (and expected) dogs that chased you down the road to brawling thugs, unicyclists and even the Grim Reaper himself, Paperboy did his round on a bizarre street that really should have earned him double wages for the sort of things he had to endure. But you soon learned not to slow down and gawp at any of these odd goings-on lest a swarm of bees appeared to hurry you along…

Another part of the game's charm was that for all its simplicity, it could be deviously tricky at times. Throwing papers into the mailbox or onto the doormat of the right houses while looking where you were going proved difficult for most newcomers, and many's the time a first-time player crashed into water pipes, hedges, pavements and cars because they couldn't quite get a handle on that vital co-ordination.

Of course, delivering papers was a key part of your job and if you missed too many of the designated houses on your round it was game over. You could score points by lobbing papers at houses that weren't on your round, but damage a property belonging to one of your customers and they'd cancel their subscription, meaning that when you rode past on the next level they'd no longer be a designated house. That's a lot to think about





▲ She may be a hottie in a fancy car, but don't let her distract you from the paper-delivering task in hand.

PAPERBOY RIDES AGAIN

Yes, there was a sequel to *Paperboy* simply called *Paperboy II*. Never released in the arcades (thankfully), instead it appeared on the Amiga, Atari and most of the home consoles. It wasn't awful but it completely missed the point of the original, which was its pure simplicity. *Paperboy II* featured Paperboy and Papergirl and it didn't make any difference which character you chose (tsk – political correctness gone mad). Furthermore, the attempt to complicate things by posting papers to both sides of the road just didn't work. There were some decent additions, but the overwhelming feeling was that of a missed opportunity when a simple update of the original would have been more than welcome.



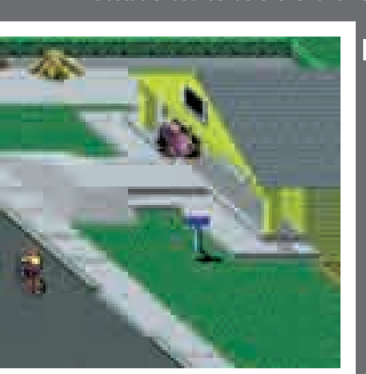
▲ Time to go all *Krypton Factor* as you leave behind the suburban streets and tackle the obstacle course.

▲ If only all jobs came with such terrific feedback. We'd be grateful for one flag-waving fan outside the office.

while you're trying to stay upright on two wheels…

Paperboy gave all gamers a fairly equal footing by allowing newbies to start on Easy Street, while seasoned handlebar wagglers could go straight in on Hard Way (with Middle Road available for players who were working their way up). One challenge that faced everyone was the isometric viewpoint which meant that you only had a second to react to anything in Paperboy's way, but as long as you weren't the one playing the game there was nothing funnier than watching someone slam into the back of a stationary car.

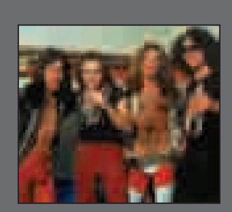
Perhaps we like *Paperboy* so much because he's an Everyman, an ordinary hero. All he's trying to do is scrape together a couple of quid even though the odds are stacked against him. That said, if you completed the obstacle course at the end of every 'day' you were treated to the sight of 20 or so cheering fans who wanted nothing more than to see you successfully reach the end of Sunday. We've always wondered about the girl in the 'I Love You, Paperboy' T-shirt. What must she do for a living?



The game was full of nice touches like this, especially when you looked at how fragile Paperboy's bike was and the way his paper basket always ended up on his head when he crashed. The soundtrack stood out too. Hearing the same tune every day didn't seem to grate, and the effects were pretty neat: the grinding engine noise from the snazzy convertibles driven by flashy women is still enough to turn our heads.

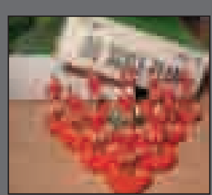
It's no surprise the game was ported to multiple home consoles, and even though it may have lost the nifty handlebar controller during the transfer, *Paperboy* found a whole new devoted audience in living rooms around the world. In fact, it's one of those games like *Pac-Man* or *Space Invaders* that's become synonymous with classic retro gaming. And *Paperboy* is a classic because it makes something that's easy in real life very difficult in an arcade game. It's also completely original. There have been dozens of clones of *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man*, but aside from the dodgy sequel, nobody has ever cloned this. It's unique, charming and an innocent tale of a 12-year-old kid just trying to do his job. Paperboy, we salute you.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1984



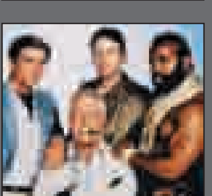
ON THE RADIO

With big hair and even bigger guitars, Van Halen hogged the airwaves with the anthemic *Jump*. Surprisingly, the band, named after guitarist Eddie Van Halen, are still around today. And Eddie's second name is Lodewijk. Which is nice.



ON THE PITCH

In 1984, Liverpool were one of the football forces to be reckoned with In Europe. After beating AS Roma on penalties in their own backyard the Reds' reputation as one of the greats of European football slipped. Until *that* game this year, of course…



ON THE TV

Wanted for a crime they didn't commit, the A-Team were Mr T, Face, Murdock and Hannibal who had all escaped from a maximum security prison. The A-Team van still serves in memory as being one of the coolest-looking vehicles in history. We still want one.



IN YOUR POCKET

Yep the organisational wizardry of the Filofax was *the* thing to have in the early Eighties. It did almost everything that your average PDA does today… only on paper. And this wasn't any old paper by the way, but really expensive non-standard stuff.

GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

NOW AND THEN, WE CELEBRATE NEGLECTED CLASSICS. THIS MONTH IT'S GIANT GRAM: ALL JAPAN PRO WRESTLING

GIANT GRAM

SEGA SLAMS IT, JAPANESE STYLE

Release: 1997
Format: Arcade, Saturn, Dreamcast
Publisher: Sega
Developer: WOW Entertainment

Don't look at us like that. You know what we're talking about: that look on your face that says you're not into the whole 'men in lycra, punching each other until one falls over' thing. Just because you're not, doesn't mean no one is, does it? You might not want to admit it, but wrestling sells, and although there have been some real stinkers (Acclaim, we're looking at you… or we would be if you weren't already dead), there have also been some corkers when it comes to grappling games. The strange thing is, most of the quality titles have had nothing to do with Western wrestling – for quality, you need to look East.

While the real champion has always been *Fire Pro Wrestling* (also covered in Retro this month), there's no denying that Sega's *Giant Gram* series was also a true masterpiece. Essentially, it was the *Virtua Fighter* of wrestling games – a belief backed by the fact that, initially, *Giant Gram* wasn't called *Giant Gram* at all. Released in 1997 on Sega's ST-V arcade hardware (a trumped-up version of the Saturn architecture), *All Japan Pro Wrestling Featuring Virtua* starred wrestlers from the Japanese wrestling federation of the same name. These included Mitsuharu Misawa, Kenta Kobashi and the legendary Giant Baba, along with a selection of US wrestlers who made the transition to the Japanese stage such as Tommy Ace and Stan Hansen, and the rather odd addition of *Virtua Fighter*'s two grapplers, Wolf Hawkfield and Jeffrey McWild. Despite being an arcade game (later a Saturn conversion), the gameplay wasn't arcade-like – a style that set up the *Giant Gram* series nicely.

AJPW Featuring Virtua sported a move list for each wrestler that read more like a complex beat-'em-up than what you'd expect from an arcade-based grappler. From basic holds to complex combos linked into other moves, reversals and counters, as well as a damage system that let you focus attacks on a specific part of your opponent's body for greater punishment, getting to grips with it took practice and a good memory. That the title still holds up today is testament to the quality of the game's engine, although the series improved considerably as it evolved into *Giant Gram*.

Its move onto Sega's Naomi arcade technology (and then to the Dreamcast) served to improve the game's graphical excellence, although the solid combat system remained similar. Additional options such as two-player tag matches, the addition of wrestlers from Misawa's newly created *NOAH* federation and *Giant Gram 2000*'s Historical Battles, all helped enhance the game and added to its cult status. Indeed, the game was so good that we're confused as to why Sega has never seen fit to use it since the release of *Giant Gram 2000* – the engine would be perfect for a serious take on the WWE, although whether that would have hardcore wrestling fanatics up in arms, we wouldn't like to imagine…





▼ Japanese? English? Who cares? This is punishment of the highest order in any language

RACE THE RAINBOW…

S·U·P·E·R M·A·R·I·O K·A·R·T

Great RETRO Gaming Moments

Release: 1993
Format: NES
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-House





For all its cutesy *Mario* heritage, the moment you reached the final race of the Special Cup in *Super Mario Kart* you realised that the game really didn't like you. It seemed like all along it had been going easy on you, lulling you into a false sense of security, so that when it sprung Rainbow Road on you it would be all the more painful.

Still, you had to finish it. Some of the other tracks had been taxing, some difficult, but this one really lived up to its Expert rating. The bright, primary-coloured track belied the fact that there was nothing between you and black oblivion, and that you were going to be falling into it. A lot.

Rainbow Road seemed insurmountable, but with time and patience it could be tamed, and that was what made it enjoyable in a masochistic way. Multiplayer Rainbow Road gave an opportunity to find ever more creative ways to drop your friends into space, and the winner would often just be the person who happened to get hit by the fewest shells.

The track has shown up in many Nintendo racers since, appearing in most of the subsequent *Mario Kart* games as well as making a cameo in *F-Zero X*. It's perhaps telling that in its later incarnations Nintendo had emasculated the track in some way, either by adding barriers or making it unbelievably long and dull, but you can never forget the first visit.

Worst LICENCE EVER

Oh, just duck off…

HOWARD THE DUCK

Release: 1987
Format: Various 8-bit systems
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Software Studies



▲ You don't really need a withering caption here to see how rubbish this game is, do you? We hope not…

Film licences are tricky prospects for any developer. After you've spent the annual budget of a small South American country on securing the licence, you then have to try to create a game with whatever money is left in your wallet. Fortunately, if the film's a hit, you've a good chance of raking back some of your cash – but what happens when the film's rubbish? Well, you end up with the likes of *Howard The Duck*, a lame game based on an even lamer movie.

From the moment *Howard* started up you realised that all your hard-earned cash had been wasted on less a duck, more a turkey. While it faithfully mimicked the plot of the movie, the game was let down by shoddy visuals, fiddly controls and dull gameplay. Controlling Howard was laboriously tricky and just making him follow your joystick directions was enough to put the average gamer off. Add to this some of the most unimaginative level design to ever make it into a game and it's a wonder that *Howard The Duck* wasn't marketed as a cure for insomnia.

With the movie proving a huge flop (not everything George Lucas touches turns to gold) the game quickly followed. If only it hadn't been burned so forcefully into our minds, we might be able to sleep at night…



Why Don't They Remake...

UNIRALLY

ONE WHEEL GOOD, TWO DIMENSIONS BAD

Format: **SNES**
Release: **1994**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **DMA Design**

In the racing genre there aren't many stones left unturned, but the unicycle racer is tragically under-represented. Thankfully for circus performers and festival-goers everywhere, the one that does exist is actually very good, and thoroughly deserving of a remake.

Published on the SNES by Nintendo and developed by DMA Design, *Unirally* looked simple and well animated, but remained focused on tight and addictive gameplay. The premise is simple: you take control of an unmanned unicycle and race rival cycles through looping and winding courses suspended in mid-air. The tracks were built to give you opportunities to perform stunts, and successfully pulling off some aerobatics would give you a valuable speed boost. And that's pretty much all there was to it. But although *Unirally* received unanimously positive reviews and is hailed by fans as one of the great lost treasures of the 16-bit era, it never really managed to set the sales charts alight.

Modern developments on newer hardware and even in current games have shown, however, that the formula could be ripe for an update.



▲ Somehow those unicycles have personality. So imagine how much more alive they'd be in 3D…



▲ Just think how amazing this could be with current- or next-gen physics. You could have a saddle-eye view.

Futuristic racers like *F-Zero* and *WipEout* have shown how well 3D graphics, insane speed and a lot of loops and jumps work today, and there's no reason why a new *Unirally* couldn't manage the same.

Some say that *Sonic The Hedgehog* inspired *Unirally*'s gameplay, and you only have to look at how well *Sonic Adventure* moved that high-speed action into three dimensions to see that it would work. *Unirally* never had particularly outlandish stunts despite the strange concept, so if the current craze for real-life physics were thrown into the mix the result could be the same manic fun that the original had.

Analogue control is an advancement that we take for granted now, but *Unirally* is practically crying out for it. Having complete control over the direction of your unicycle with a few deft thumb flicks would exponentially increase the number of stunts available. Zipping around with the ability to pull off any risky manoeuvre that you want (if you think it can give you that little extra edge over your opponents, of course) has the potential to be tremendous fun.

Then imagine it with online play – an endless supply of willing opponents at your fingertips, all eager to partake in the same madness that typified the multiplayer in the original.

Sadly, it's unlikely to happen. DMA Design created a little game called *Grand Theft Auto* (you might have heard of it), became Rockstar North, and the rest is history. A remake of *Unirally* wouldn't really fit into its portfolio alongside the likes of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and *Manhunt*, so this looks like one game that's set to remain an esoteric gem. Still, the idea's certainly very appealing…



LOVED BY HARDCORE FANS THE WORLD OVER AND YET IT'S BARELY EVER MADE IT OUT OF JAPAN. SO WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES FIRE PRO WRESTLING SO AMAZING?

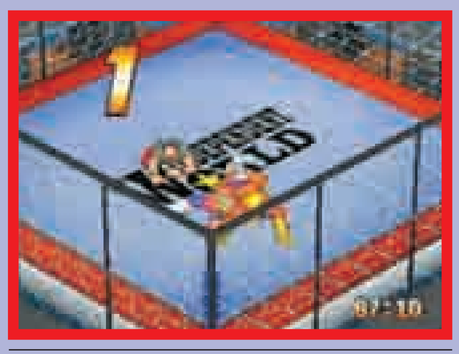
RING OF FIRE



▲ Having up to eight players in the ring at once makes for some particularly hectic action, plus lots of shouting and genuine punching among friends.



▲ Copyright issues might have stopped Human using recognisable names, but that didn't stop it putting familiar faces in under alternate titles.



▲ Cage matches prove particularly nasty, especially if you duke it out long enough for those explosive after-effects to go off with a bang…

Gamers who are wrestling fans, and who profess to be in the know, will be quick to inform all and sundry that the greatest wrestling game of all time is *WWF No Mercy* on the N64. Five years on from that game's release, all wrestling games seem to tremble in its shadow. But there's another group of wrestling-fan gamers who are even deeper in the know. These people will tell you that *No Mercy* isn't half as good as its Japanese counterpart *Virtual Pro Wrestling 2*. And they'll also tell you that neither game is in the same league as the all-powerful, genre-dominating 2D masterpiece that is *Fire Pro Wrestling*.

The Fire Pro brand is not only an incredible achievement in terms of the developer's approach to producing a title that boasts pure, unfussy gameplay, it's also a lesson in how to garner loyalty and love from a videogame fanbase. Gamers who understand *Fire Pro* believe that the developer's first concern is a respect for two industries that they adore – professional wrestling and videogames.

It all began with Human Entertainment. Human, a company better known in the West for the *Clock Tower* titles on the SNES and PlayStation, became aware that many of the wrestling games built around Japanese Puroresu (pro-wrestling) promotions were not connecting with the fans. Most of these titles were button-bashing, arcade-style efforts that simply didn't appeal to the technical wrestling leanings of most of the Japanese puro fan community. Human couldn't compete for these lucrative licences, so it took advantage of some of Japan's very lax copyright legislations and created *Fire Pro Wrestling*. The game, which crept out on the PC-Engine in the summer of 1989, kept the likenesses of legendary Japanese and American wrestlers but craftily altered their names. The wrestling fans, who could recognise their favourites after seeing a few beautifully animated moves, realised that while there wasn't a licence attached, the tool for their Dream Match was finally in their hands. Human had caught fire in a bottle.

The *Fire Pro* series had a slow but steady evolution; the control system has remained the same since the game's conception. Simply put, Human got it right first time, and all that was needed was to steadily improve what was already present and correct. *Fire Pro*, for those of you not yet fortunate enough to step inside its ropes, has a control system that's beautifully simple yet staggeringly deep. It's perhaps best understood by considering it alongside other 2D stalwarts. *Street Fighter*, for example, offers instantaneous joy for the new player – but a master player pulling Ryu's strings will kill any newcomer dead. The same can be said for *Fire Pro*. In the hands of an *FPW* veteran, Kenta Kobashi or Ric Flair will seem an insurmountable challenge for someone making their ring debut. This distinction between veteran and first-time player, this gulf in skill and class that a player can endeavour to widen or narrow by putting in the hours, is the true mark of a multiplayer classic. It's also the main factor that sets *Fire Pro* apart from the endless rubbish that hits Western shelves in the name of wrestling gaming.

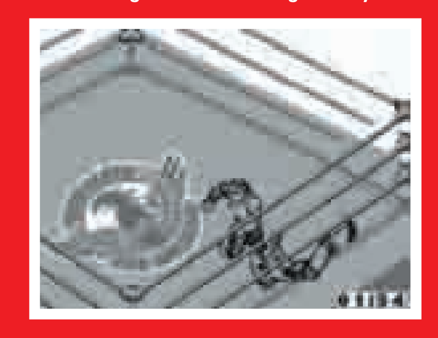
THE EVOLUTION

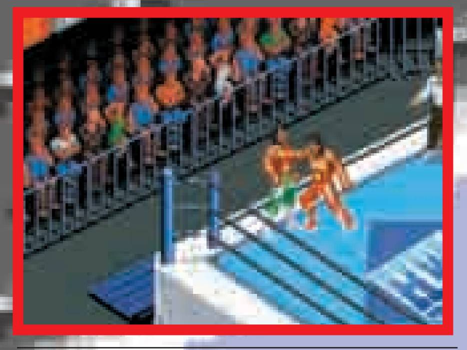
In the few years that followed that first quiet release, Human expanded the game's roster, and started to fill the title out with things the fans were asking for. In 1993 and 1994 *SFPW3* and *SFPW Special* arrived on the Super Famicom, and Human shaped up for big changes. A major player in this transitional period in *Fire Pro* history was Goichi Suda, the *killer7* creator now regarded as one of the most exciting minds in the industry. Suda is the prime example of a *Fire Pro* developer. Wrestling obsessed, his wonderful *killer7* features a masked wrestler as a playable character, and with his previous title – the bizarre survival horror *Michigan* (PS2) – he made a point of naming every character after wrestling icons. He's a true eccentric, a wrestling nut, and regularly appears in Japanese games magazines wearing a variety of wrestling masks. Suda and the small group of wrestling-crazed developers behind *FPW* were steering a course toward a landmark date in 1995 – the release of *Super Fire Pro Wrestling X* on the Super Famicom.

Super Fire Pro Wrestling X was a massive leap forward, both technically and in terms of the game's size. The roster, by this time, featured 104 wrestlers from all over the globe. Each one had unique moves, was beautifully drawn, and gloriously animated. The ability was there to create your own fighter. *SFPWX* was the game that established the ▶

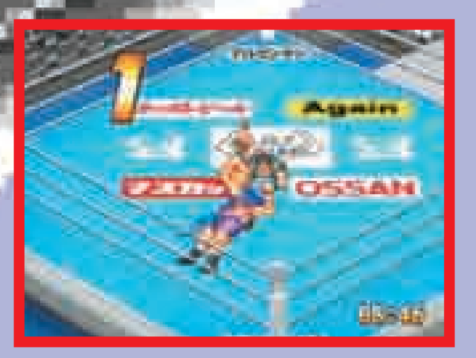
FALLS COUNT ANYWHERE

Fire Pro seems to pop up on every platform, no matter how ill-suited that platform might be. We've already looked at the PC-Engine, SNES, Saturn and Dreamcast versions, but the Wonderswan version demands a little more focus. The WonderSwan was a nice little handheld, but even its biggest fans would agree that its controls didn't really lend themselves to ports of action-intensive games. And yet, somehow, the WonderSwan version of *Fire Pro* managed to overcome the technical and practical limitations of the machine. It's one of the greatest examples of the solidity of *Fire Pro*'s game mechanic. It simply works. In fact, there hasn't been one true version of the game that doesn't do the series proud (as long as we ignore the ill-fated *Iron Slam '96*, a silly and unnecessary venture into 3D for *Fire Pro*). For that reason, it'll be worth keeping an eye out for the mobile phone version of *Fire Pro*, which is out now in Japan. This might be the true test of the game's seemingly limitless adaptability. The mobile phone is not the ideal gaming device so will *Fire Pro* still find some way to work its magic? We'd hazard a guess at yes.





▲ If you've never seen genuine Japanese wrestling, we'd suggest you check it out – it's technically far superior to anything the WWE has to offer.



▲ It's the little touches, such as differences in each wrestler's movements or the way the referee reacts to near pinfalls, that makes *Fire Pro* special.

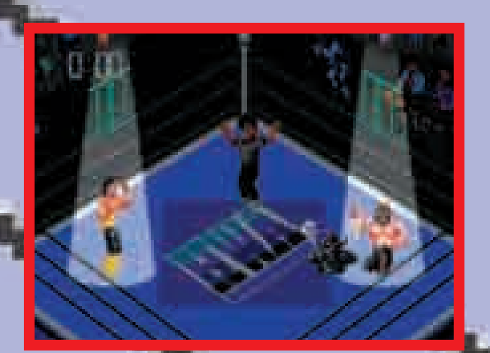


▲ Check your watch… know what time it is? That's right – it's time, it's time, it's Vader time. Or quarter to six, if you're using the 24-hour clock.

series as the giant of the genre. Indeed, years later, as the SNES emulation community started to kick off, *SFPWX* emerged as a new-found classic among wrestling fans. Here was a five-year-old game that bettered any wrestling game in stores in the West. The legend started to spread.

Fire Pro, in the meantime, diversified. There were women's wrestling games, like the brilliant *Queen's Special*, and there was the ill-advised misfire of *Iron Slam '96*, *Fire Pro*'s first and last venture into the 3D arena. Sega's Saturn was blessed with *6 Man Scramble*, which is still considered a high point of the series. The Saturn multi-tap offered the opportunity for six men in the ring at once – a gaming joy that had to be experienced to be believed. The PlayStation saw the release of *Fire Pro Wrestling G,* with a massive roster of 194 wrestlers and PocketStation support. The fans, as ever, were pleased.

What must be understood about the *Fire Pro* story is that while the game had a voracious following, the title was still appealing to a niche audience. *FPW* games were hungrily snapped up by fans, but there were no smash-hit titles. There was no crossover appeal. The developer stuck so closely to its beliefs – that licences were unnecessary, that the 2D engine it had built was near-perfect, that there was no need to labour the product with gimmicks and crass selling points – that it isolated itself from the mass market. *Fire Pro Wrestling G* was the last *FPW* game from Human Entertainment, and the company went under late in 1999.



A NEW DIRECTION

The *Fire Pro* story could have ended there. If it had, we would never have seen the release of a title considered by many as the most important wrestling game of all. That game is the landmark puroresu powerhouse that is *Fire Pro Wrestling D*. The Japanese devco Spike, which had a relationship with Human, stepped in to buy the rights to the *Fire Pro* name and established an internal team of *FPW* veterans to focus on the future of the series.

The next title was to be released on Sega's Dreamcast, and the power under that console's hood allowed the developer to pursue the *Fire Pro* philosophy of improvement, enhancement and expansion like never before. The roster size exploded – 220 wrestlers featured, representing every major global promotion. There were MMA fighters; an octagon was included; and a shootfighting element was nailed perfectly in place. Do the fans want exploding cage matches? Probably. In it went. Would the fans want brutal deathmatches with boards covered in barbed wire, fluorescent strip lights as weapons, and crimson deathmask blade jobs? Of course they would. In it all went. The Wrestler Edit mode, which had been great before, became a thing of unmatched beauty. Hundreds of edit slots, and the ability to create almost anyone, with so many moves to choose from you'd spend all night deciding which headlock best suited your Mick McManus CAW. The Dreamcast's online capabilities were exploited too. Months after the release, Spike continued to release downloadable wrestling moves, taking fans' requests for which one they'd like to see next.

FPD was a game that gained a following worthy of its majesty. The fan community created massive edit packs of entire wrestling companies, and made them downloadable to all. The giant roster just kept getting bigger and bigger; you could spot an *FPD* fan no problems – he was the guy whose pockets were bulging with extra Virtual Memory Units. People shared stories online, telling each other about great matches they'd just taken part in, and there was an overwhelming sense of camaraderie. We are gamers, we are wrestling fans, we are *Fire Pro*.

The key to the appeal of *Fire Pro* is in the balance the game strikes between being a competitive game and a celebration of professional wrestling. It's not enough for a *Fire Pro* fan to beat their opponent, they have to work a great match too. *Fire Pro* is so true to its source that it encourages its players to think like wrestlers. It's a feat that could only be made possible

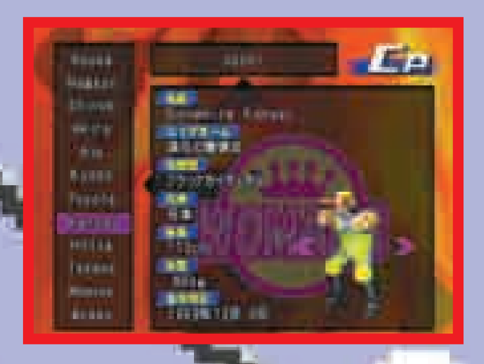
"THE INCREDIBLE FIRE PRO BRAND STANDS AS A LESSON IN HOW TO GARNER LOYALTY AND LOVE FROM A VIDEOGAME FANBASE"

RING AROUND THE WORLD

The *Fire Pro* community plays a big part in the continuing legend of the great franchise. This community wouldn't exist in the West were it not for the work of a few superfans who have helped bring an ease of use to this Japanese title. One of these fans is Edward Crowser, the American who was vice president of the Fire Pro Club back in the days of the Sega Saturn's *6 Man Scramble*. Crowser wrote review after review, submitting them to websites and forums all over the net, in an attempt to raise the profile of the game.

"I've never spent more time dedicating myself to any single videogame," says Crowser. "Why? Well, as a lifelong wrestling fan, once I discovered *Fire Pro* I finally realised that 'the' wrestling game had been created. A game had been made that finally incorporated the greatest wrestlers from all over the world and literally put hundreds of moves at your disposal. Any wrestler that plays videogames has at least heard about the game. Not everyone has played it, because it's so hard to import a system and translate the Japanese. But for the few that do, it becomes a passion. It is a game that transcends cultural barriers and in the professional wrestling videogame genre, it stands alone as the greatest wrestling videogame series ever created."

Crowser now helps run IWA East Coast Wrestling, an independent wrestling promotion in the US.





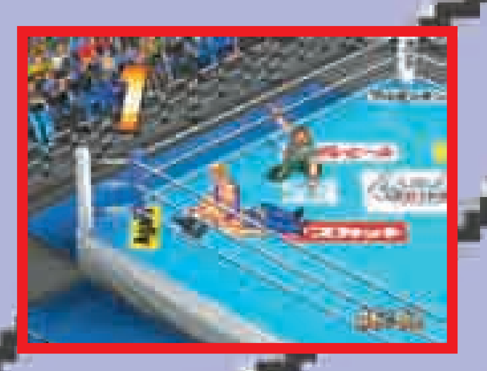


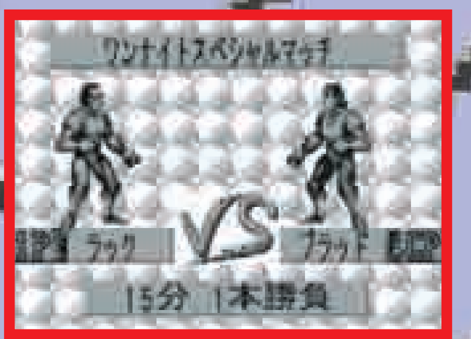
▲ Even the women got in on the action further into the *Fire Pro* series. Don't fancy yours much…

"THE KEY TO ITS APPEAL IS IN THE BALANCE BETWEEN BEING A COMPETITIVE GAME AND A CELEBRATION OF PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING"

by a development team who have an innate understanding of what makes wrestling great, and what makes games great. When two veteran *Fire Pro Wrestling* gamers sit down for a match, there is no shame in coming away defeated, as long as you've fought a thrilling bout. Indeed, there's always the sense that it's better to lose a tussle than to win with some cheap sleeperhold finish in the sixteenth minute of a boring match. One of the huge draws of the *Fire Pro* titles are the legendary Critical finishes, where one move can suddenly end a match with a bone-crunching snippet of animation and a quick flash of the word 'Critical!' on screen. The sight of the losing party in these Critical encounters cheering as their on-screen avatar lies motionless and beaten in the ring would baffle many multiplayer gamers in other genres, but this is where the *Fire Pro* magic is most apparent. The games are as much about the beauty of a perfect wrestling finish as they are about competitive videogame victory. There is truly little else quite like it.

Fire Pro will go on. The PlayStation2 title *Fire Pro Wrestling Z*, which carried the emotive subtitle 'Goodbye Fire Pro. Thank You Fire Pro' was supposed to be the last *FPW* game we'd see, but *Fi-Pro Returns* is due on PS2 any time now, and there are also rumours of a Nintendo DS title. Again, a masked developer is courting the media, under the mysterious moniker Mask de Spike. He's promising that the future of *Fire Pro* is bright, while posing for the cameras with clenched fists. *Fire Pro* is a game produced by wrestling fans for wrestling fans. It is a 2D warrior in an arena full of swaggering 3D steroid monsters. As long as there are wrestling and games, and there will always be wrestling and games, then there will be a place for *Fire Pro*. Thank you, indeed.





THE NAME GAME

As any *Fire Pro* fan will tell you, there's great fun to be had with the *Fire Pro* method of avoiding licensing issues – giving fake names to famous wrestlers. The good and the great in the wrestling industry have been renamed on many occasions by those fine fellows at Human, and there are some classic monikers that simply have to be made known to the general punter.

See if you can work out exactly who these fake names were assigned to over the years…

A) Dick Slender
B) Solid Gold Steam Odin
C) The Undead Taylor
D) Gigaton Joe
E) Ax Duggan
F) Big Snider
G) Big Macho Small Snider
H) Raven Gash

Answers
A) Ric Flair, B) Stone Cold Steve Austin, C) The Undertaker, D) The Big Show, E) Hulk Hogan, F) Rick Steiner, G) Scott Steiner, H) Kevin Nash

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

WELL, THE COLLECTING GAUNTLET HAS BEEN WELL AND TRULY THROWN DOWN. READY TO FACE THE RETRO CHALLENGE IS 31-YEAR-OLD ANDREW CAMPBELL, A FINANCE AND RESOURCES MANAGER FROM ILFORD. ANDREW HAS BEEN HUNTING DOWN VIDEOGAMES SINCE 1996 AND HAS BUILT UP A VERY IMPRESSIVE HOARD…



Q) How did you first become interested in collecting games?

AC: I was first captivated when I visited arcades on holiday with my parents. I remember looking forward to seeing the latest machines and couldn't wait until each summer. I vividly remember the first time I clapped eyes on the likes of *Kung Fu Master* and *Out Run* – I thought they were amazing and still play them today. The thought of playing games I used to play in arcades at home has always appealed to me. And with the march of technology making it easy to pick up games for older systems at a great price, it seemed rude not to.

Q: When did you start collecting?

AC: I had always regretted selling my Spectrum and Commodore 128 in order to move up to the latest and greatest machine so I decided to hang onto my Amiga and Mega Drive. However, I didn't really start collecting until the Sega Saturn, as I used to buy import versions of all the Capcom fighters because many weren't appearing in the UK. The advantage of being able to play games at full screen and at full speed shouldn't be underestimated and it led to me buying an American N64 instead of the inferior PAL version. Everything just escalated from there.

Q: All your items are in good nick. Do you ignore a desired game if it's damaged?

AC: Not at all. While I tend to look for games that are absolutely mint, I've no problem picking up a title that isn't in the best condition, especially if it's one I've been after for some time. After all, I can always replace it with a better copy at a later date.

Q: Why so many RPGs?

AC: I just find them fascinating to play. You can't beat a well-crafted story, and some RPGs have amazing plots and characterisation. Strangely enough, I only became interested in RPGs after playing *Final Fantasy VII* on the PlayStation. After that I started to discover some of the older classics on the SNES and never looked back.

Q: What's been your most expensive title?

AC: Probably *Radiant Silvergun* for the Sega Saturn, but I did pay a bit more than I should have done for *Castlevania: Vampire's Kiss* on the SNES when I eventually tracked it down.

Q: So what's your favourite game?

AC: Now that is a question. I did spend a fair bit of time playing *Mario Vs Donkey Kong* on the GBA while travelling round India recently. However, my favourite games of all time are probably *Mario 64* and *GoldenEye* for the N64. I spent way too much time playing those games when they first came out, as Nintendo and Rare managed to make every single aspect of each game perfect.



▼ No such thing as a dull evening round this place – just look at all that stuff. You'd be busy for years.



▼ Not all retro games have to be great – we doubt you'll be seeing a *Chessmaster* feature any time soon.



▼ Eighties and Nineties videogames – the priceless mantlepiece ornaments of the future. Or something.

Q: You've got some nice boxed Atari titles. What's the appeal of the machine?
AC: The Atari VCS is the console that really started bringing gaming into the home in a big way and made gaming absolutely massive. I remember playing on a VCS round a friend's house and it was the first time I had ever seen a games console.

Q: You have PAL and NTSC games, but do you have a particular preference?
AC: On the older consoles the PAL versions could be crippled with slowdown and large borders; in those circumstances I would always go for the NTSC version. I've had several of my consoles modified to play in both 50/60Hz and would recommend it to anyone with a compatible TV. There's also the added advantage of being able to get games not released in the UK, so I'm all for NTSC gaming.

Q: Do you tend to hoard games for your collection, or do you play what you buy?
AC: I play a lot of what I buy, but I simply have too many games to play them all – hopefully, I'll get around to them when I eventually retire. Playing games tends to be more of a social thing nowadays for me though, so I regularly have friends over for games nights.

Q: Where do you get most of your games from and have you ever found a bargain?
AC: Independent game shops, boot sales, adverts in local papers and online stores are all good places; eBay is also a good source if you're looking for something specific, and it's well worth importing from abroad. I also have to say a big thank you to some of my friends and work colleagues who have donated items when clearing out their lofts. As for bargains, I recently found a limited edition copy of *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* at a boot sale for 50p, but sadly it was missing the game CD. Luckily, I then found a normal edition in the London CEX for £11.

Q: What do your family think about it all?
AC: My parents are cool about my collection and even let me store stuff in their loft, even though I haven't lived there for eight years. Without their support some of my collection would be homeless. Some of my friends think I'm a bit nuts, but these games hold so many good memories for me that I don't really mind. I recently went to a friend's wedding and he still mentions the day I beat him 5-4 at *Matchday 2* after being 0-4 down.



▼ You've heard of Phil Spector's wall of sound? Say hello to Andrew Campbell's wall of games.



Share your views about old-school gaming

Retro Contact

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peters Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

HANDHELD HISTORY

Dear games™

After buying an Xbox in April, I've become more interested in the wider gaming world, especially handhelds. I've decided to start investing in them, as I am very interested to find out how games have progressed to where we are today. I was wondering if you could give me any advice or suggestions for retro handhelds. I've found an interesting Neo-Geo Pocket Color package on a couple of import sites. Would that be a good place to start? Any advice is greatly appreciated, except eBay – I'm not in with that whole vibe.

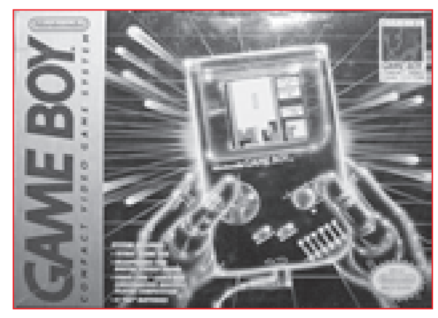
Phil Maguire

If you're going to start collecting handhelds you may as well start from the beginning. An original Game Boy can be picked up for around a fiver and there's a great selection of classic games available. If you're not too happy about visiting eBay, why not try somewhere like www.videogameauctions.co.uk. Though the site's fairly new, the prices are reasonable and you can usually get whatever you want. Otherwise your best bet is to try shops like GameStation.

SILLY PUTTY?

Dear games™

Due to your recent article on *Putty* [issue 35], great interest has sprung up on Amiga websites that *Putty Squad* may still be out there. Many Amiga users remember playing the demo, which was released towards the end of the Amiga's commercial dominance. Although it's easily attainable using a SNES emulator, there's nothing quite like an Amiga version.



Best retro handheld for a beginner? Got to be the Game Boy, yes?

If at all possible, would you be able to liaise with Dan Philips regarding the game and possibly supply his working version to the Amiga community? As long-time Amiga users, we are used to disappointment but any feedback would be gratefully received.

Paul Laycock

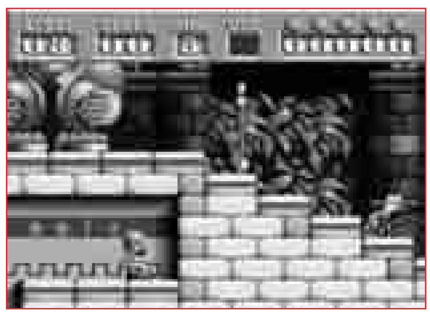
We're looking into this for you now, Paul. Sadly, Dan Philips is up to his neck in PS3 development so he's rather busy at the moment. Hopefully we'll have some sort of confirmation for you next month.

MARIE CELESTE MYSTERY

Dear games™

There's a game I used to love playing as a kid, but I just can't remember its name, so I was hoping you could help me out. You play as a young man and there's one scene when you're standing outside the Marie Celeste. You then have to fill a sock up with gold coins and swing it at a robot guard.

Another scene takes place in an ice palace, where there may be something to do with lasers being deflected. Finally, I got stuck on a



Demand for the *Putty* sequel is high; will Dan Philips answer the call?

cloud with a church spiral at the end of the screen – I always tried to walk across but ended up falling through the cloud to the scene below. After consulting my brother, we've decided that this game may have been released between 1990 to1993. Please help me if at all possible; wondering what this game is called is driving me mad.

Lucie Ostrer, via email

Dammit, you've totally stumped us. We've been scratching our heads for the last two weeks and haven't a clue as to what your mystery game could be. Maybe one of our readers will hold the answer…

REPTON RENEWED?

Dear games™

After opening the first pages of issue 35, I immediately noticed a screenshot from the old game *Repton*. When I was about eight years old, I used to think this was the best game since *Space Invaders* (I only had an Acorn Electron back then – it was my first ever computer and I loved it!). I reckon *Repton* could make a comeback. You know, in glorious 3D! Even if no









STAR LETTER

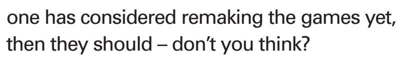
Dear games™
It might sound like a very obvious comment but retro gaming sure is fun. Not a day goes by without me discovering a long-forgotten game, whether it's from your magazine or the bargain bin of my local games shop.

And the best thing about this whole thing is the cost. Sometimes games are as cheap as a large loaf of sliced bread. Yes, there are expensive titles (we're talking £2.99 here) but because they're so cheap you can afford to take a risk.

I sometimes feel like I'm giving these games a good home – a warm bed, some good loving and three square meals a day. Sometimes I can't help but feel sorry for a few of them languishing in some forgotten corner, virtually begging to go to a good home. They don't ask for much, just a little play once in a while, maybe a discussion about them in a magazine. Simple stuff really.

Anyway, I've rambled on long enough. I just had to tell you about my unconditional love for all things retro. Time for a lie down with my Neo-Geo Pocket Color…
Ryan Summers

You're quite right – one of the greatest aspects of retro gaming is finding old titles you never got to play first time around. We're not sure we agree with you about prices (some games really are worth more than £2.99) but you've got us all dewy eyed with nostalgia, so have a prize for making our stone hearts break.



one has considered remaking the games yet, then they should – don't you think?

I also want to know if you have done or will do a feature on the Acorn Electron because it was a good machine back in the day. It even had a built-in assembler, although I didn't know this at the time – I was too young and instead spent hours attempting to write my own text adventures, all with pointless moving graphics to the sound of bleeps in BASIC.

Finally, do you know any good emulation and ROM sites where I can play *Repton* games on my PC?
Wesley White

Superior Interactive is still actively selling Repton games, so pay a visit to www.superiorinteractive.com where you'll find all the *Repton* love you'll ever need. Oh, and a 3D Repton would be horrible… As for the Electron, it's not been covered yet, which means there's every chance we'll be getting round to it pretty soon.

UN-MEGA MAN

Dear games™
As a true fan of Capcom's *Mega Man* games, it hurts me to see what it's done to the series over the past decade. It doesn't surprise me that Capcom's scaring off the younger generation with these new RPG games and the soul-destroying versions of the *X* franchise in 3D.

The debut NES titles and first *Mega Man X* games on the SNES were brilliant, however, and I heard earlier in the year that a retro collection of these early classics was going to be released. Sadly, I've heard nothing since. Please put me out of my misery and give me any advice on what happened to the collection and where I can find it, if it is out there?
Adam English



Repton in 3D? Are you sure? We remain thoroughly unconvinced.

Alas, the *Mega Man Anniversary Collection* is no longer scheduled for the UK. Fortunately, it does work with the Freeloader, so visit sites like www.videogameplus.ca and grab a copy.

SPACE INFRINGERS?

Dear games™
After reading the Taito interview in issue 36, it shocked me to discover that Tomohiro Nishikado had ripped off *Space Invaders* from the ancient *Block* game, which I'm assuming played like *Breakout*. The gameplay is very similar: he just took the blocks away and replaced them with aliens, then changed the paddle to a ship and the ball to bullets. If I was the guy who invented *Block* I'd be pretty angry.

I also heard Nintendo stole *Tetris* from some Russian company before exploiting it under its name and collecting the profits. Is this true?
Andrew Wigstaff

Whoa there. We're pretty sure Tomohiro Nishikado didn't 'rip off' *Block* – show us the developer whose game doesn't in some way resemble another game and we'll show you someone who's hidden his source material very well. And Nintendo didn't steal *Tetris* but because of licensing issues the game's creator had to wait years before he saw any money.







It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

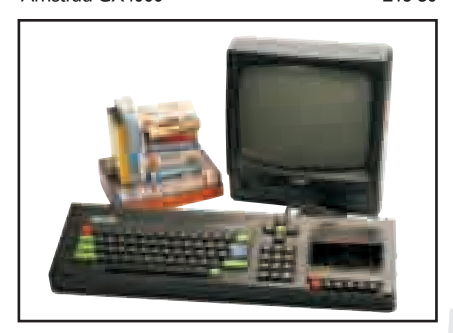
Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-25
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£15-30



ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£15
Atari Jaguar	£20-30

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35



MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£70-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£50-100
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£115-220
PC Engine GT	£50-150
Super Grafx	£200-300



NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£10-200 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-40
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20-40
Mega Drive	£10-20
Game Gear	£10-25
Mega CD	£40-60
Sega 32X	£30
Sega Nomad	£75-150
Saturn	£20-35 (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£20-40

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo-Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo-Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo-Geo CD	£125-175
Neo-Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo-Geo Pocket Color	£30-50



Right, you've just picked up a second-hand console and are looking for some classics to play on it. The only problem is, you're not too sure what to go for. Hopefully we can help. Every month we'll be printing the current prices for a range of classic games for a particular system. Of course, this is subject to change so don't be surprised if you manage to get one for less (or, unfortunately, more). Now that gamers who might have been import-shy in the Nineties can get their hands on an all-regions SNES for as little as £40, we thought it was time to take a look at the best PAL and NTSC SNES RPGs…

Secret Of Mana

Estimated Price: £30-60 (in mint condition)
Developer: Square

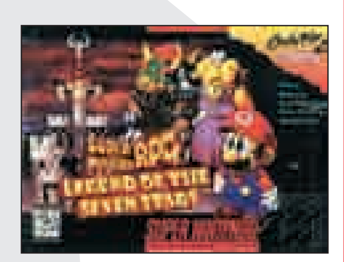
Secret Of Mana remains the paramount SNES RPG for many, and though PAL copies are fairly hard to come by, you should be able to pick up an American cartridge with relatively little hassle. With real-time combat, two-player functionality and an engrossing story, *Secret Of Mana* is easily one of the best games on the system; it merges traditional RPG values with an action-based combat system and a relatively fast pace. Shame its sequels never made it out of Japan, but this is a corker.



Super Mario RPG

Estimated Price: £20-40
Developer: Nintendo

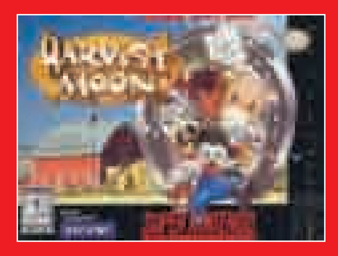
Another baffling America-only release, *Super Mario RPG* represented one of Mario's first new directions before he began to try his hand at golf, tennis, partying, baseball or whatever else Nintendo might decide to slap a licence on this week. Paving the way for the *Paper Mario* titles on the N64 and GameCube, this isometric adventure's cheerful style and an innovative mix of turn-based and real-time combat make it stand out as an RPG for more than just its star character. It may seem a little pricey at £40 but certainly for Mario nuts it's a must-have.



Harvest Moon

Estimated Price: £20-45
Developer: Victor Interactive

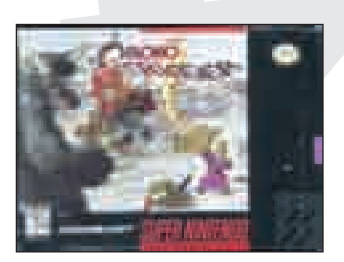
It might not be an RPG in the traditional sense, but that doesn't stop *Harvest Moon* from being one of the most endearing games on the Super Nintendo. Developing your character, your farm, your animals and your relationships with the neighbouring community is unnaturally compulsive, and though subsequent *Harvest Moon*s have added numerous additional layers of complexity to the formula, this original is still worth seeking out for its sheer charm alone. The fact the series is still going must be testament to this title's appeal.



Chrono Trigger

Estimated Price: £30-70
Developer: Square Soft

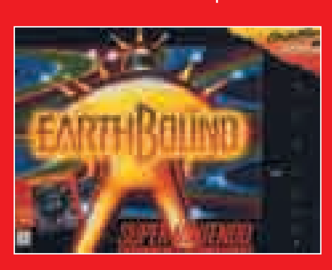
Few RPGs inspire such devotion as *Chrono Trigger* – the fact that people who aren't even collectors still actively seek this out speaks volumes about its quality and timelessness. The soundtrack and graphics were way ahead of their time and the game still appeals aesthetically today. Most extraordinary, however, is *Chrono Trigger*'s replay value – by playing it over and over again, collecting more money and pieces of rare armour on the way, the player can experience more than ten different endings. A SNES essential.



Earthbound

Estimated Price: £30-40
Developer: Nintendo

Although *Earthbound* divided opinion, this is a definite collector's item. If there's one thing the game has, it's charm – a host of bizarre characters and situations continue to delight even the most active imaginations. In terms of its mechanics, *Earthbound* isn't really anything special, featuring an unexceptional turn-based battle system in the vein of the *Dragon Warrior* series and a rather conventional storyline. But somehow the game still manages to make itself stand out through the sheer bizarreness of its premise.



Final Fantasy III

Estimated Price: £15-30
Developer: Square

It's impossible to write about Super Nintendo RPGs without including *Final Fantasy VI* (which was called *Final Fantasy III* in the States as only two previous *Final Fantasy* titles had made it to the US). For a number of role-playing fans of the time, many of the other excellent games featured on this page were nothing more than ways to pass the time until this instalment of the already legendary *Final Fantasy* series arrived. Sadly, it featured several cuts due to nudity and strong language, but they hardly detract from the greatness of this game, which is available for a reasonable price.



Terranigma

Estimated Price: £25-30
Developer: Enix

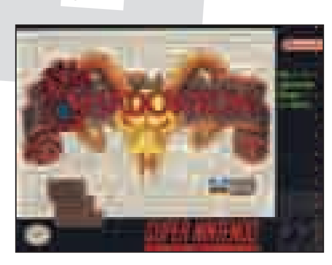
Terranigma has a strong following as an unusually non-linear RPG with one of the most interesting storylines ever. As young protagonist Ark, the player controls the evolution of the world by travelling across the continents. Although the game can get frustrating at times – the unfortunate side-effect of non-linearity being occasional cluelessness at to what to do next – the game still holds together well, and though its graphics and sound don't match the aesthetic panache of *Chrono Trigger*, it's worth committing up to £30 of your disposable income to owning a copy of this title.



Shadowrun

Estimated Price: £25-45
Developer: FASA

Unlike many other SNES RPGs of the time, FASA's *Shadowrun* was a dark and foreboding adventure that was a world away from the cutesy style of *Secret Of Mana* and *Chrono Trigger*. Blessed with a superb storyline, great combat and some fantastic visuals, *Shadowrun* told the tale of Jake Armitage, a Shadowrunner who has been left for dead. Waking up a few minutes later (without his memory, of course) Armitage has to piece his life back together. While *Shadowrun* did receive a UK release, it was a limited run, so it's very hard to get hold of at a decent price.



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



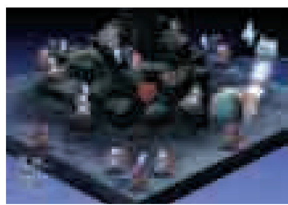
MINNA DAISUKI KATAMARI DAMACY

A world without *Katamari Damacy* wouldn't be worth living in, as far as we're concerned. You might not believe us, but if you're the kind of person who can't find fun in rolling things up in a ball… well, you're clearly not our friend.



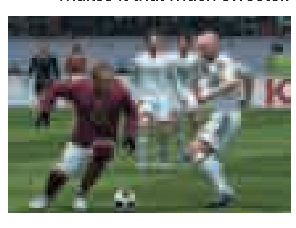
MAKAI KINGDOM

You'd have thought that Nippon Ichi would have got it wrong by now – it's made so many RPG titles, the law of averages says something has to go wrong eventually. Thankfully, *Makai Kingdom* is sheer bliss, so that's another bullet dodged. Hurrah.



WINNING ELEVEN 9

We know what you're thinking: how does Konami do it? The fifth iteration of the *Winning Eleven* series arrives and already it's hailed as the best football game ever. That it deserves the accolade, of course, makes it that much sweeter.





PLAYSTATION2

Manufacturer Sony
UK Launch Date 24 November 2000
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £104.99

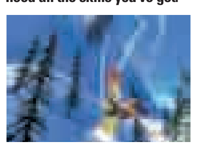
The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PStwo is available in both traditional black and 'special' silver.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

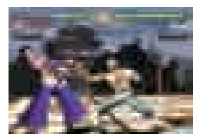
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout Revenge	EA Games	Criterion Studios	A refinement of everything that makes *Burnout* so great
Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	In-House	Hard as nails but certainly the highlight of the series
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
God Of War	Sony	In-House	Sony's answer to *Devil May Cry* is a godly delight
Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Polyphony Digital	Worth the wait, thankfully – even without the online mode
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Bigger, badder, better – a great *GTA* experience
Gregory Horror Show	Capcom	In-House	Bizarre, twisted and yet oh-so enjoyable
Gitaroo Man	THQ	Koei	The genuine thing of rhythm-action beauty
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Minna Daisuki Katamari Damacy IMPORT	Namco	In-House	Just as quirky as the original, which makes it brilliant
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	In-House	Flawed genius, but genius nevertheless
Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House	The original still reigns for style and substance
Rez	Sega	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk's* of the snowboarding world
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft	Better? Again? How does Neversoft keep doing it?
Winning Eleven 9 IMPORT	Konami	In-House	The best football game around? Yes – again
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House	By far the deepest 3D fighting game around today

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

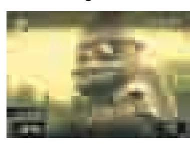
SSX 3
Get some practice in – with *SSX On Tour* just around the corner, you're going to need all the skills you've got.



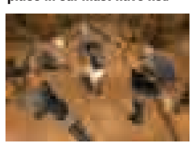
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution
A night of playing this has reminded us exactly why it still stands as one of the best fighting games ever made.



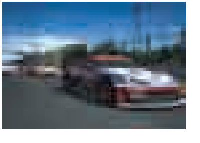
MGS 3: Snake Eater
Certainly a slower-paced *Metal Gear* than we're used to, but still one that's both exciting and absorbing at the same time.



POP: Sands Of Time
The argument of 'which is better' rages on, but *Sands Of Time* certainly deserves its place in our must-have list.



Gran Turismo 4
The furthest end of the hardcore driving spectrum. As detailed and in-depth a racer as you're likely to find.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE



XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft
UK Launch Date
13 March 2002
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £99.99

Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. Despite the upcoming Xbox 360, Microsoft has pledged to support the console until at least 2007.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

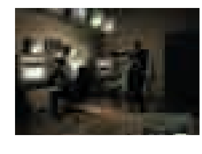
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Burnout Revenge	EA Games	Criterion Studios	Another high-speed smash of a success for Criterion
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios	A fine example of great gameplay and top-notch graphics
Def Jam: Fight For New York	Electronic Arts	Aki Corporation	Ultra-violent fighting has never looked so good
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box	A special breed of RPG – well worth experiencing
Fahrenheit	Atari	Quantic Dream	A hauntingly beautiful and intriguing adventure game
Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	In-House	No *GT4* comparisons – just a solid Xbox racing game
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	And about time too – a better version in almost every way
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Tecmo	Damn tough, but a great example of style and gameplay
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants	A complete change of pace for *Oddworld* that really works
Out Run 2	Sega	Sumo Digital	Stunning reproduction of a great arcade game
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House	The only football game worth owning, period
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House	An enjoyable and solid psychic blasting romp
Psychonauts	Majesco	Double Fine	Wonderfully unique and enjoyable, if a little short
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House	An essential update to the hugely popular Live game
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	In-House	The best *Splinter Cell* yet, thanks to the co-op mode
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	In-House	The greatest collection of fighting games ever? Oh, hell yes
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Free Radical	An infinitely expanding universe of online blasting action

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

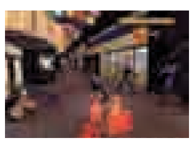
Def Jam: Fight For New York
Violence begats violence… especially when rap stars are involved. Thankfully, it's quite fun as far as *Def Jam* goes.



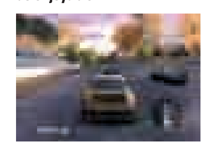
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory
Certainly the best example of the *Splinter Cell* series so far, although is there anything left for Sam Fisher to save?



GTA: San Andreas
Forget the scandal – when all's said and done, there's no denying *San Andreas* is a modern marvel of a game.



Jet Set Radio Future
Still great fun to this day – a sure sign of a must-have game. If you haven't tried it, now's the time to do so.



Forza Motorsport
The Xbox's yin to *Gran Turismo*'s yang; perhaps not as detailed, but certainly as enjoyable.




games™ VIEWPOINT

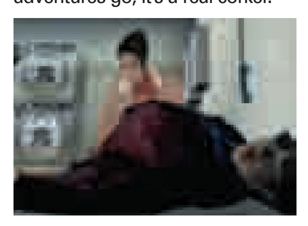
KINGDOM UNDER FIRE: HEROES

Disappointment is a cruel master when it comes to videogames – you get your hopes up, only to see them dashed on the rocks of mediocrity. *Heroes* had its chance, but blew it; too many flaws stop it from being great.



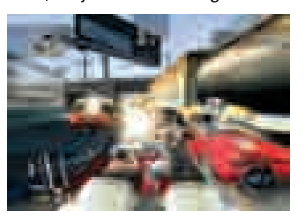
FAHRENHEIT

Every once in a while, a game comes along that makes you sit up and take notice, not because it's graphically amazing or action-packed, but just because it's unique. *Fahrenheit* fits that profile perfectly – as story-driven adventures go, it's a real corker.



187: RIDE OR DIE

There's nothing wrong with street culture – indeed, there's nothing better than 'chillin' in 'yo crib' with your 'homies'. But *Ride Or Die*'s existence almost borders on offensive; from the language and music to the game (or lack of) itself, it's just embarrasing.



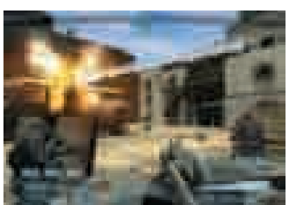
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



RAINBOW SIX: LOCKDOWN

Updating something doesn't always make it better, you know – if you don't believe us, try *Rainbow Six: Lockdown* on for size. And with no online mode to speak of, the GameCube version is sadly quite lacklustre.



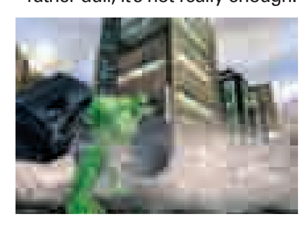
DDR: MARIO MIX

Don't look at us like that – we can't help being partial to a bit of *Dance Dance Revolution* action. Of course, the fact that the series has been dumbed down for the GameCube audience is a little insulting but still, it's not exactly a terrible way to spend your time.



THE INCREDIBLE HULK: ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION

Hulk smash indeed… though perhaps not in the way that Vivendi might have originally intended. Yes, so running around destroying things is quite a laugh but when the rest of the game is rather dull, it's not really enough.





GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo
UK Launch Date
3 May 2002
Media
3-inch Optical Disc
Current Price £79.99

Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option if you love videogames.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

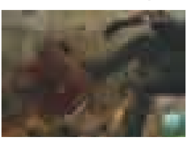
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Alien Hominid IMPORT	03 Entertainment	The Behemoth	Hardcore 2D blasting with a sense of humour
Chibi-Robo IMPORT	Nintendo	Skip	Charming miniature robot fun – simple but effective
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	Sega does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume	Highly absorbing – the *Animal Crossing* of farming games
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	A grower, by all accounts – take your time and enjoy
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House	Another great 3D outing for our favourite female bounty hunter
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems	Hugely entertaining and challenging at the same time
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House	More flowery fun for those of a patient disposition
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House	Reinvention on a scale that brings the series back to life
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House	Not perfect, but still a very fine *Mario* adventure
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House	An absolute beast of an RPG that will dominate your life
Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	In-House	A fine return for our favourite side-scrolling superhero
WarioWare: Mega Party Game$	Nintendo	In-House	A party game that'll have you rolling in the aisles
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	Far better than its clueless detractors will have you believe

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

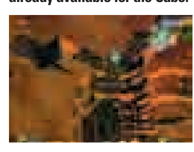
Harvest Moon: AWL
Not quite *Animal Crossing* for the farming generation, but certainly a fine slice of the rural life for GameCube types.



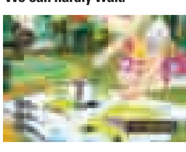
Resident Evil 4
If you have to ask why you should own this, there's something wrong with you – see a doctor immediately.



Zelda: The Wind Waker
So what if *Twilight Princess* has slipped into next year? There's still a great *Zelda* title already available for the Cube.



Chibi-Robo
Good news, everyone – supposedly, *Chibi-Robo* is going to come out in the UK. We can hardly wait.



Animal Crossing
Who needs real friends? We're quite happy delivering things to our animal pals in our own little world, thanks.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

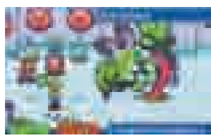
Astro Boy: Omega Factor
■ Never mind the niche manga angle – *Astro Boy's* GBA outing is a great example of how platform action should be done.



SMA3: Yoshi's Island
■ The GBA's tendency for reliving Nintendo's past may be odd, but it doesn't stop *Yoshi's Island* being as much fun now as it was then.



Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga
■ Of course, if you're more about adventuring than you are jumping over platforms, you'll probably want to give this a whirl.



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

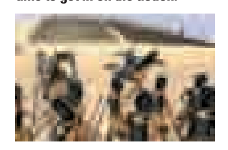
Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	Digital Illusions
City Of Heroes	NCsoft	Cryptic Studios
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2005	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
GTR – FIA GT Racing Game	Atari	SimBin Development
Guild Wars	NCSoft	ArenaNet
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	NovaLogic	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Firaxis Games
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	Maxis
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games
World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	Blizzard

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Battlefield 2
■ About as good as online multiplayer shooting action gets – DICE really does know its stuff when it comes to *Battlefield*.



Rome: Total War
■ The expansion to Creative Assembly's Roman strategy epic is out now, so it's the perfect time to get in on the action.



Half-Life 2
■ Valve has new *Half-Life 2* material up its sleeve for release soon, so you'd better hurry up and finish the current version of it.



PERIPHERALS

EACH CONSOLE HAS THOSE MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS – CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THEM?

XPLODER MOVIE PLAYER

Console: PlayStation Portable
From: Lexar
Price: Varies
Available: Out Now

Yes, yes, we know the PSP is a lovely piece of equipment. We're also fully aware of what it can do and how useful its media functions can be. But have you considered what you're going to do when you run out of space on that tiny 32Mb memory stick that came free with it? Exactly. If you're looking to make use of the PSP's multimedia functions, a memory stick upgrade is vital, and while there are plenty of options available, we'd suggest that going down the official Sony road might prove a little costly. Lexar, on the other hand, has a fairly solid line of PSP memory sticks available. Starting at just £34.99 for 256Mb and going all the way up to 1Gb of space, the metaphorical cherry on the storage cake is that the cards come complete with Xploder Media Centre Lite software for all your media management needs. It's like Lexar read our minds…



PSP SOUND GRIP

Console: PlayStation Portable
From: Logic3
Price: £19.99
Available: Out Now

GET HOLD OF GREAT SOUND

As we're of the impression that handhelds are meant to be portable, we're not the biggest fans of bolt-on attachments – magnifiers, lights and so on. However, Logic3's PSP Sound Grip manages to make us happy purely on the basis of its functionality and usefulness. While the PSP's built-in speakers and headphone port may seem adequate much of the time, using a PSP in a noisy environment soon shows that even at the highest volume, the machine's sound isn't great. Attach a PSP Sound Grip, however, and all that changes. Although slightly unwieldy to use in a gaming capacity, using it to enhance your movie-viewing and music-listening experience improves the PSP's audio capabilities immensely. It also comes with a detachable stand, meaning you can sit back and relax while the PSP and Sound Grip do all the work – handy if more than one person wants to watch. And it's certainly prettier than some of the other offerings on the market.



ZEN VISION

Console: n/a
From: Creative
Price: £300 (approx)
Available: Out Now





With the PSP now available the world over, the concept of portable media devices is really starting to take off among people other than gadget freaks and those with silly amounts of disposable income. Naturally, many will see the PSP as the obvious choice given its affiliation with the might of the PS2, but there's no denying the handheld's limitations; a lack of video and audio format support (not to mention the cost of high-capacity Memory Sticks) really emphasises how short the machine falls right now. If it's purely portable media that you're after, though, as opposed to the addition of a gaming angle, there is an alternative…

Having captured a small percentage of the portable music market with its range of Zen players, it's not that surprising to see that Creative has expanded its horizons to encapsulate video and photographs too. The result is the Zen Vision – a pocket-sized media player not much bigger than an iPod, with a 3.7-inch high-res screen and 30Gb of storage space. Such capacity allows for over 15,000 songs, tens of thousands of photos or up to 120 hours of high-quality video to be transported anywhere, with USB 2.0 connectivity making transferring all your media an incredibly speedy process.

However, it's the range of support that really sets the Vision apart. From the variety of video and audio playback formats (from MPEG-2 and MPEG-4 to WMV, DivX and XviD-encoded files, as well as MP3 and WMA) and the adaptable support of Flash-card media to the built-in microphone (for on-board voice recording), organiser functions and FM radio, the Vision is a solid and genuinely affordable portable media device.

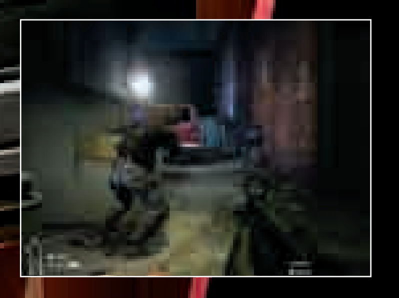
PLAY TO WIN

COME JOIN THE GAMES™ ONLINE GAMING COMMUNITY – WE'VE LAID ON EVERYTHING YOU'LL NEED TO ENJOY SOME OF THE VERY BEST PC MULTIPLAYER TITLES AROUND

Once again, the **games**™ PC gaming servers (brought to you in conjunction with our friends at Jolt Online Gaming) have seen plenty of action in the past month. If you haven't experienced them yet, you're missing out on a treat. Of course, the winds of change will soon be blowing through the servers – it's about time the games had a bit of a spring (well, autumn) clean, after all – so if any of the following games are among your favourites, it's probably a good idea to get your playing in now while you still can…

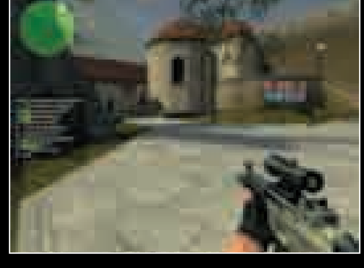
SWAT 4

Making a new entry onto **gamesTM01** is Vivendi's cop-busting FPS *SWAT 4*. We've set up some games of Barricaded Suspects (that's Team Deathmatch, to those who don't know), although Co-op mode will also be making an appearance.



COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

Still reigning supreme on the popularity list it's *Counter-Strike: Source* on **gamesTM02**, and to be honest, we can't blame you. Particularly since Valve introduced the new levels.

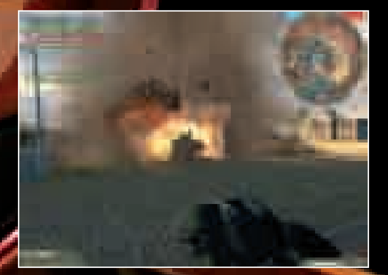


PAINKILLER

The same old game as before on **gamesTM03**? Well, not quite. Yes, we've kept *Painkiller* but we've also installed the new PK++ mod to keep things interesting. The pain level is still just as high as it ever was, though…

BATTLEFIELD 2

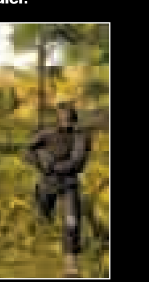
It shouldn't surprise you to learn that **gamesTM04** now plays host to our current favourite online game – just search for 213.208.119.130 in the game's IP browser, using '**crabbattle**' as your password to enlist in our ranks.



JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING

No change here, simply because you seem to be loving it so much. Advance And Secure remains the game on **gamesTM05**, so get out there and crack some skulls in the jungle, soldier.





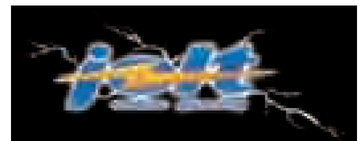
Getting onto the **games**™ servers couldn't be easier – simply call up the available server list within any of the above games, find the relevant **games**™ gaming server and, providing the server isn't already full, click to enter. Our servers are still available to all, with no restrictions and are accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you have any problems or experience difficulty logging into the servers, just drop us a line at gamestm@paragon.co.uk, making sure that the words '**games**™ servers' are displayed clearly in the subject heading of your email.

JOLT ONLINE

The official **games**™ servers are provided by Jolt Online Gaming, the number-one gaming server provider in Europe. Jolt's servers have been seen by many as the benchmark in online gaming performance in Europe since 1999.

Jolt believes that online gaming is about more than just logging on to a random game server and playing with strangers. By fostering a strong relationship with its community and giving gamers places to hang out, Jolt has become host to one of the largest and most vibrant gaming communities in the world – you can join today by visiting http://forums.jolt.co.uk

Jolt also offers a variety of personalised game server packages catering for everyone from small clans looking for a private practice ground to large clans and organisations who want the prestige of their own branded and totally dedicated server boxes running multiple public game sessions with integrated admin tools, anti-cheat software and access to a dedicated support team. With prices starting at £12 a month, Jolt's servers are affordable to all. For more information visit www.jolt.co.uk



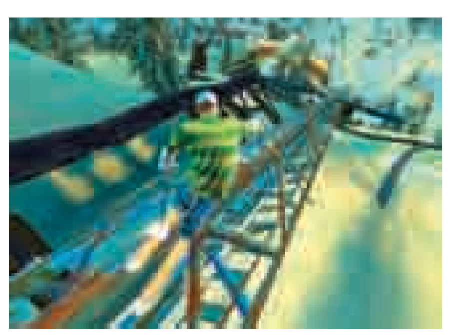


Fed up with the rigours of day-to-day life? Rather enjoy a peaceful existence in the company of animals? Then you're in luck. Next month, games™ visits Japan to get the lowdown on *Wild World*, the DS version of Nintendo's escapism-'em-up. Which is a real genre. Honest.

ANIMAL CROSSING

180
PAGES OF COMMUNITY GAMING

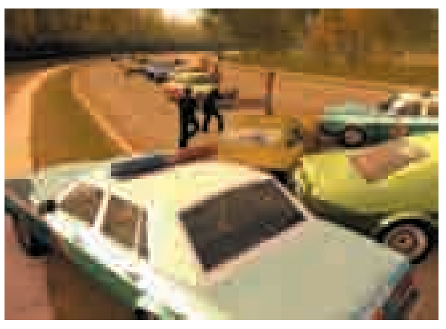
NEXT MONTH


After dividing our ranks with *SSX3*, how will EA fare with the revamped *On Tour*?

MORE… REVIEWS

With Christmas now looming, it should come as no surprise that next issue will be a bumper feast of gaming. *SSX On Tour*, *Call Of Cthulhu*, *Battalion Wars*, *Marvel Nemesis* and *Tony Hawk's American Wasteland* should all be going under the microscope. And the fun won't stop there – expect next month's reviews section to be among our biggest yet…

"GAMEPLAY-WISE ON TOUR DOESN'T SEEM THAT DIFFERENT FROM SSX3"


Tanner hands in his badge and new boy TK steps up to right Atari's wrongs. Good luck, kid…

MORE… PREVIEWS

It's goodbye, Blighty, hello, K.K. Slider next month as **games™** jets over to Nintendo's HQ for a sneak peek at *Animal Crossing: Wild World* as well as delivering the usual spread of goodness – how do *Driver: Parallel Lines*, *Supreme Commander* and a look at EA's next-gen line-up sound? And we should have that big piece on *Black* we promised last month…

"AFTER THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF DRIV3R, PARALLEL LINES HAS TO BE BETTER"


Are Japanese developers under threat from growing American operations? Find out

MORE… FEATURES

Japan used to be the holy land for gamers, but now developers in Europe and the US are stealing the limelight. How, when and why did things start changing? Meanwhile, Retro is going compilation crazy with packs from Sega, Taito, Capcom and Namco as well as giving Treasure's *Sin And Punishment* the love it so rightly deserves. Phew.

ON SALE 3 NOV 05

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think – now you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry. Or not…

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peters Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum?

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the browser window: **www.gamestm.co.uk**
You will arrive at the **games™** website. Nice, isn't it? Click on the 'forum' icon near the top of the page. If you're a first-time visitor to the forum you'll have to register before you can post. Just click 'register', fill in a few details (such as a username and password) and you're away.

Step Three:
Ha! There is no step three. It's that simple. Just choose which thread looks most interesting then post your deepest, darkest thoughts (preferably concerning gaming) in there. There's even a dedicated letters thread where you can post anything you'd like to see on these pages.

games™ reserves the right to edit letters for space and/or clarity. The views expressed in letters on these pages are those of the correspondents and not **games™**. If you want a healthy debate, we'll see you on the forum…

NOW THAT *WORLD* *Of Warcraft* has hit four million subscribers, I can't help but start to wonder about the future of gaming. There's an enormous investment in online play, from the Xbox 360's myriad online features to the ever-expanding world of PC MMORPGs. We can play against people from Korea and Germany and Australia without leaving our seats.

But what about multiplayer gaming in the home? I'm not talking about having a few mates round for some beers and *Pro Evo*, I'm talking about being able to play games with my wife, my children or my friends who haven't been following gaming since they were teenagers. It's all very well being able to play online with anyone we like, but there's enormous potential in making gaming as communal a family activity as watching television or going to the cinema by introducing the medium to people who would rather not sit in front of a computer playing against people they don't know. Who's catering for them?
James Davis

games™: How about Nintendo? With the Revolution controller just announced, the Japanese giant is targeting the non-gamer more aggressively than ever before. It will be interesting to see if jumping and swinging around in front of the TV appeals to the female demographic more than clutching a controller.

DOES ANYBODY ELSE remember the original Xbox being pushed for nearly £500 when it came out and then a few months later being slashed by nearly £200? I do (I've got the receipt to prove it) and I remember the 'consolation pack' including a few ropey titles (*Blood Wake*) and a controller to compensate.

Let's hope Microsoft isn't planning anything like this with its new baby. I know for a fact I won't be rushing out to buy one at launch and will be waiting at least a year before I go for a 360 – and I'm certain a lot of people who had their fingers burned last time will be doing the same. I'm not predicting a lot of 360s flying off the shelves at launch.
Si Monkman

games™: Well, at a much more reasonable £289 (or, indeed, £209 for the model without the hard drive), the Xbox 360 isn't going to burn a hole in your pocket like its predecessor. When the original Xbox launched, Microsoft was a new player in an ultra-competitive market. Now, with a few years' experience under its belt, it has the knowledge and market savvy to ensure a (probably) successful launch, We'll be very surprised if it launches the Xbox 360 to anything less than rapturous acclaim.

AM I THE ONLY one who thinks Mario is losing his spark? What Nintendo has done with him in the past five years or so makes my gaming heart bleed. I grew up on Mario games, so to see him appear in all manner of shoddy, sport sim spin-offs with 'Mario' slapped on them makes the Italian stallion seem like a desperate, degraded actor looking for any kind of work he can get his tattered gloves on.

We all know why Nintendo's doing this – it's to sell as many games as possible, which frustrates me. What are we up to now, Nintendo, *Mario Party 7*? Please. It's like giving

"IT'S ALL VERY WELL BEING ABLE TO PLAY ONLINE WITH STRANGERS, BUT **THERE'S HUGE POTENTIAL IN MAKING GAMING AS COMMUNAL** A FAMILY ACTIVITY AS WATCHING TELEVISION OR **GOING TO THE CINEMA**"



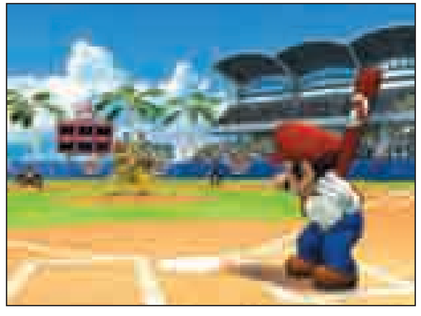
SMS TEXT

We've got an exclusive SMS text service sponsored by Orange. Simply text us your question or comment on

07970 043498



The games™ SMS texting service is brought to you courtesy of Orange. For more information on Orange's range of wirefree™ games log on to: www.orange.co.uk/multimedia



Is it time for Mario to retire and leave the licensed sports games to someone else? Or should he just stick to platforming?



Whatever you may say, the tilt control would have been awesome in *Mercury*. Just remember to sit still when you play…

a bag of sugar-coated sweets to some kids, only for them to bite into a stone centre.

Long gone are the days when that red cap meant something: when the mere mention of Mario's name would bring magical memories flooding into your mind, like soaring through clouds with a yellow cape or frantically firing balls of flame at Bowser. Now all it conjures up is Koopa swinging golf clubs and tennis rackets near an oversized, boring board game. I think *Mario 64* was his last proper smash – an adventure game, just how it should be. Sure, *Sunshine* was fun to an extent but it didn't come close to the originals.

I'm keeping fingers crossed for the plumber's rebirth via the fabled *Mario 128* if it ever appears. I'll forgive Nintendo for its fighting efforts and RPG attempts, but the fact is we need more classic platformers and fresh ideas, not the old cast playing football or rolling dice for the umpteenth time. Has Mario really lost it or am I growing up too fast?
David Stevenson

games™: We're pretty much in agreement with you here. If all the Mario games shared the quality of the platformers, then we'd have no problem; Nintendo can milk the licence as long as it wants. However, with sub-par software such as *Mario Tennis* and *Baseball* sporting that famous Italian mug, we can't help but feel aggrieved at Nintendo's rather cynical attitude. If it wanted to go leftfield with a title like 'Mario Sniper', for instance… now that would be quite something.

FOR LACK OF SOMETHING better to do, last night I was re-reading old issues of **games™**. I stumbled upon the preview for *Mercury* and found your complaint that it was not using tilt functionality. This is all well and good, until you realise exactly what the PSP is used for – it's to keep you busy on journeys.

Picture the scene: you're on the verge of completing a level where you have to keep most of your mercury, you tilt the PSP… and the designated driver slams on the brakes. Or your plane hits some turbulence. Regardless of your means of travel, this could easily happen. Or someone could jog you. So, in any situation, your precious mercury, which you've managed to keep intact, goes tumbling off the stage, showing off the physics but leaving you stunned at the cruelties of fate. So quite simply I feel that the analogue nub is a superior method of control.

It's fine for you games journalists who can test tilt games in the comfort of the office, but when used in anger, the system would probably frustrate more than delight. So I for one would rather Sony did not implement tilt functionality because it would stop me from enjoying great games like *Mercury*. I mean, the game's difficult enough as it is.

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Text Life

Do you guys play any MMORPG's? If so how do you balance them with your stressful jobs?
g™: Yes, we love a bit of MMORPG action, but sadly we have less free time than Tony Blair.

The new *Zelda* had better be good – I'd be selling my Gamecube to afford a 360 right now if it wasn't for Link + co getting delayed.
g™: Would the £3 you'd get for selling your Cube really help you afford that 360?

I bet *Pro Evo 5* is gonna be reeaally similar to number. 4.
g™: Then you'd lose your bet, and be poor.

Wireless pads aren't needed. They run out of batteries, cost more and current leads are long enough – so whats the point in them?
g™: Because we're sick of the ball of wires that sits beneath our television, never to be untangled.

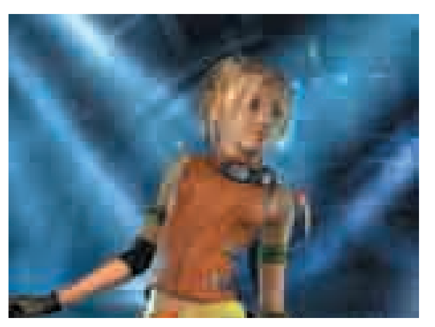
I demand you cover more *Megaman* games in the retro section!
g™: Make us!

Have Nintendo actually released any in-game shots of the Revolution? I'm anxious to see what it can do.
g™: Do you not read the news section then? It certainly looks rather interesting…

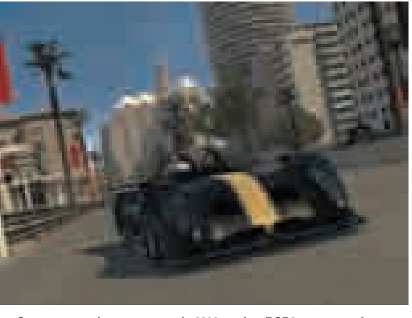
If face mapping was halted on the N64 *Perfect Dark*, how can we know for sure the new version won't have it taken away as well?
g™: Can we really know anything for sure?

New PC games need downsizing. I'm running out of space on my computer!
g™: Get a new hard drive.

Where were the scores in your PSP reviews in issue 35?
g™: Why do you need a number to tell you everything? You know you're meant to read the actual text to find out what we thought, right?



For services to music in games, *Final Fantasy* should be rewarded – by being allowed to summarily execute DJ Stryker from *Burnout 3*…



So, are you going to pay nearly £300 to play *PGR3* as soon as it comes out, or will you wait to see if Xbox 360 gets reduced?

And *Super Smash Brothers Melee* should be in the GameCube essentials list.
Cameron Griffiths

games™: Are you telling us you can't play PSP games inside – only journalists can? Surely the best option would have been to have both tilt and analogue control, so if you're on a bumpy journey, you can switch without losing your precious ball of liquid metal. Still, we stand by our word – don't tempt us with tilt control then snatch it away come release. Please.

AS FAR AS I'm aware, **games™** is primarily a UK publication, so why is it that so many Japanese games are reviewed in its hallowed pages and passed off as UK exclusives? Can you really offer a comprehensive review when you can't read what Mario is blubbering on about in Japanese in *Mario Baseball* (or whatever)?

Why can't you just wait until the UK copy becomes available before voicing an opinion? I would submit that it's the age-old problem that such publications have in trying to 'one-up' their rivals by emblazoning their front cover with the words 'exclusive'. I, for one, can happily wait until the definitive UK review. Again, as far as I'm aware, the import scene is not that big over here anyway.

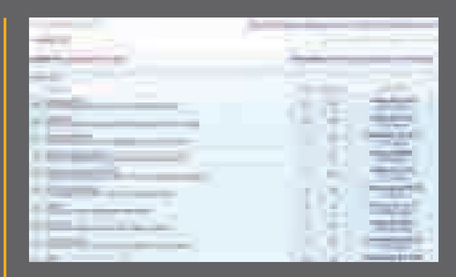
It reminds me of the days of yore when Amiga magazines would review half-finished games, or use PC screenshots, or (God forbid) review the PC version to garner that exclusive. Obviously, you're not so bad (you're reviewing the game after all) but it just eats away at my faith in the views of the writer, although they are far from alone – in fact, all other magazines are doing it.

Surely not being able to understand what the characters are saying will, in most cases, affect the reviewer's ability to empathise with characters and the situations they are presented with and thus the overall score? Clearly it wouldn't matter so much in, say, beat-'em-ups but it's not really the point, is it? We want to know what the games we are buying are actually like. We don't want to see a paragraph or two saying "well, I don't think it matters so much that I can't read the stats in the game". How would they know unless they could read them?

The odd interesting import game is fine. It's those reviews of games that will clearly be released in the UK in due course that annoy me. You expect a reviewer to be playing the same game that you've shelled out your £40 for. If the reviewer cannot understand what is being said in the game how do you expect them to fully appreciate the experience?
'Ian Aris'

games™: You may be happy waiting for the UK release of your most anticipated games,





FROM THE FORUM

REMAKES AND REMIXES – WHICH CLASSICS NEED AN UPDATE?

but a lot of our readers are part of the import scene and trust us to give them the heads-up when it comes to foreign games. As for *Mario Baseball*, it's not exactly a text-heavy RPG is it? The simple principle of hitting the ball a long way then running round the bases is pretty much universal, regardless of language. If you can find any review in **games™** that says 'well, I don't think it matters so much that I can't read the stats in the game', we'll be very surprised. We'll be even more surprised if you can find any instance where we've flagged up an import review as an exclusive UK review…

I LOVE MUSIC. It brings back memories of happy or painful times, it brings out emotion with just a few simple notes, it can inspire or it can sedate. So why is that game music so often drives me up the wall? I'll concede that sometimes it's done just right – just look at *Ico* or the majority of the *Final Fantasy* series for proof – but most of the time it goes very wrong. So wrong, in fact, that more often than not the music gets switched off and replaced with whatever's in my stereo. A handful of licensed tracks on *Tony Hawk's 2* were okay at the time but after the latest title it seemed to spiral out of control, and just look at the list of tracks on the upcoming *Burnout* game – a list longer than any I've seen yet.

And the thing that really gets me is do these tracks contribute to the game or its sales? Would you buy a game just because it has a new track by your favourite artist? Of course not, you're going to buy the album. So it begs the question of what purpose do they serve?

Sticking with the *Burnout* example, I loved *Burnout 2* – I still maintain it's the best in the series. Even the music fitted well, a quiet little tune in the background until you pressed the burnout button then whoosh – your speed shoots up, the screen distorts and the speakers come to life! *Burnout 3*'s soundtrack annoyed me. Tracks by bands I didn't know or even like and every three minutes the 'super gnarly' DJ coming in to put me off. He was almost as bad as the DJ on *SSX3* (almost, but not quite).

Why do companies do this? These licensed tracks are a bad point as far as I'm concerned. Why is popular music being shoe-horned into popular games? It's advertising! In-game advertising. The companies think we'll love the game, therefore love the music and therefore buy the albums. I can't stand it!

Oh, and if I play one more adventure game where nu-metal blasts out every time I get into a fight I'm going to explode.
'Imldaho'

games™: Firstly, DJ Stryker was much worse than the DJ in *SSX3*. But we digress. We agree with you that the sub-dynamic audio in *Burnout 2* was infinitely superior to the EA 'trax' that litter the latest two games, but there's always the custom soundtracks option (if you buy it on Xbox). Another way to look at these licensed soundtracks is the helping hand they can give to new bands. Kasabian, the Dead 60s and the Futureheads must have been laughing when EA phoned up to ask them for a track for its games. There's definitely a difference between a score and a soundtrack, however. As long as story-driven games such as the *Final Fantasy* titles maintain a high standard in musical scores, then we'll be more than happy to crank up the volume.

"LICENSED SOUNDTRACKS DRIVE ME INSANE. **WHY IS POPULAR MUSIC SHOE-HORNED INTO GAMES?** IT'S ADVERTISING! THE **COMPANIES THINK WE'LL LOVE THE GAME AND THEREFORE BUY THE ALBUMS.** I CAN'T STAND IT!"

Xephon
I've been playing *Vagrant Story* recently, and it occurred to me it would benefit from an update. Wouldn't it be great to see a game like *Vagrant Story* get the graphical polish it deserves? What games would you like to get a next-gen update?

Papa
Power Stone, with a liberal dollop of online play. Just thinking about it makes me so excited that I… erm, I'd best go.

Jusatsushi
Mine would be *Secret Of Mana*. I know a lot of people would say sacrilege as it's amazing as it is, but there's something about this game that I think would suit a graphical makeover. Maybe even as a simple online adventure rather than a massive grindfest with years of your life required…

Captain Commando
Panzer Dragoon Saga. I absolutely loved that game but now the graphics look dated and I can't bring myself to play it again because it isn't the beautiful game I remember it to be.

Hong Kong Phooey
How about *Pilotwings* on the N64? From what I can remember it was a lovely chill-out game, just swooping here and there.

Windy
I'll plump for *Ogre Battle* which has had many additions and remakes already. Another one would be something to shout about.

toythatkills
I'd quite like to see a remake of all the 2D *Sonic* games, randomly. Imagine the speed they could go at, and the level of detail they could get into those backgrounds!

Xephon
I'd love to see *Silent Hill* given the remix treatment too (like *MGS* was) – proper lovely game engine with even more detail than *Silent Hill 2*.

darthjim
Frontier (*Elite II*) would be wonderful if updated properly. The freeform gameplay, the scope of the thing – it'd be fantastic. Add to that list *Chaos Engine, Sleepwalker, Uridium, Skidmarks, Supercars, Ruff 'n' Tumble* and *First/Second Samurai* and I'd be a happy little gamer. You could add some game called *Turrican* to that list too.

Porkupine
I'd like to see what could be made of some of the old Amstrad games. A 2D *Dizzy* game would be great on a modern console. A *Jet Set Willy* that you could actually complete. *Chucky Egg*, oh let's. *Spindizzy? Marble Madness? Rainbow Islands?*


games™